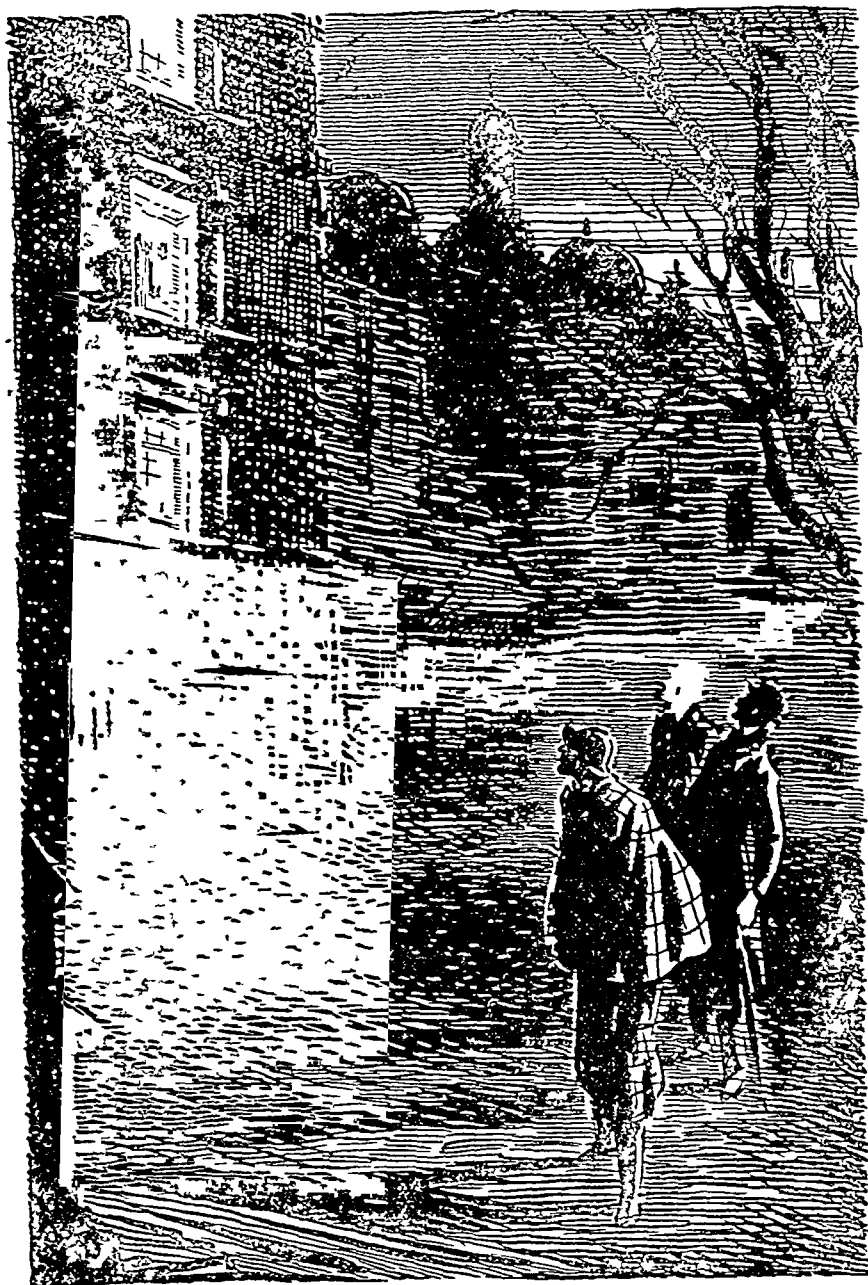


THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE STUDENTS



"Your three birds are all in their nests," said Holmes

FIFTY FAMOUS DETECTIVES OF FICTION



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THE NECKLACE OF PEARLS



He had only to snip the pearls from the string with his pocket-scissors



He managed to get hold of the weapon after a struggle



Putting one tremendous hand upon his collar

SOLVED BY INSPECTION



Very quietly, very evenly, they pulled up the ropes

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PHILIP MANSFIELD



He saw two men, carrying a stretcher, cross the lawn.

THE SIAMESE CAT



He plainly saw a cat on the window-sill pawing the window

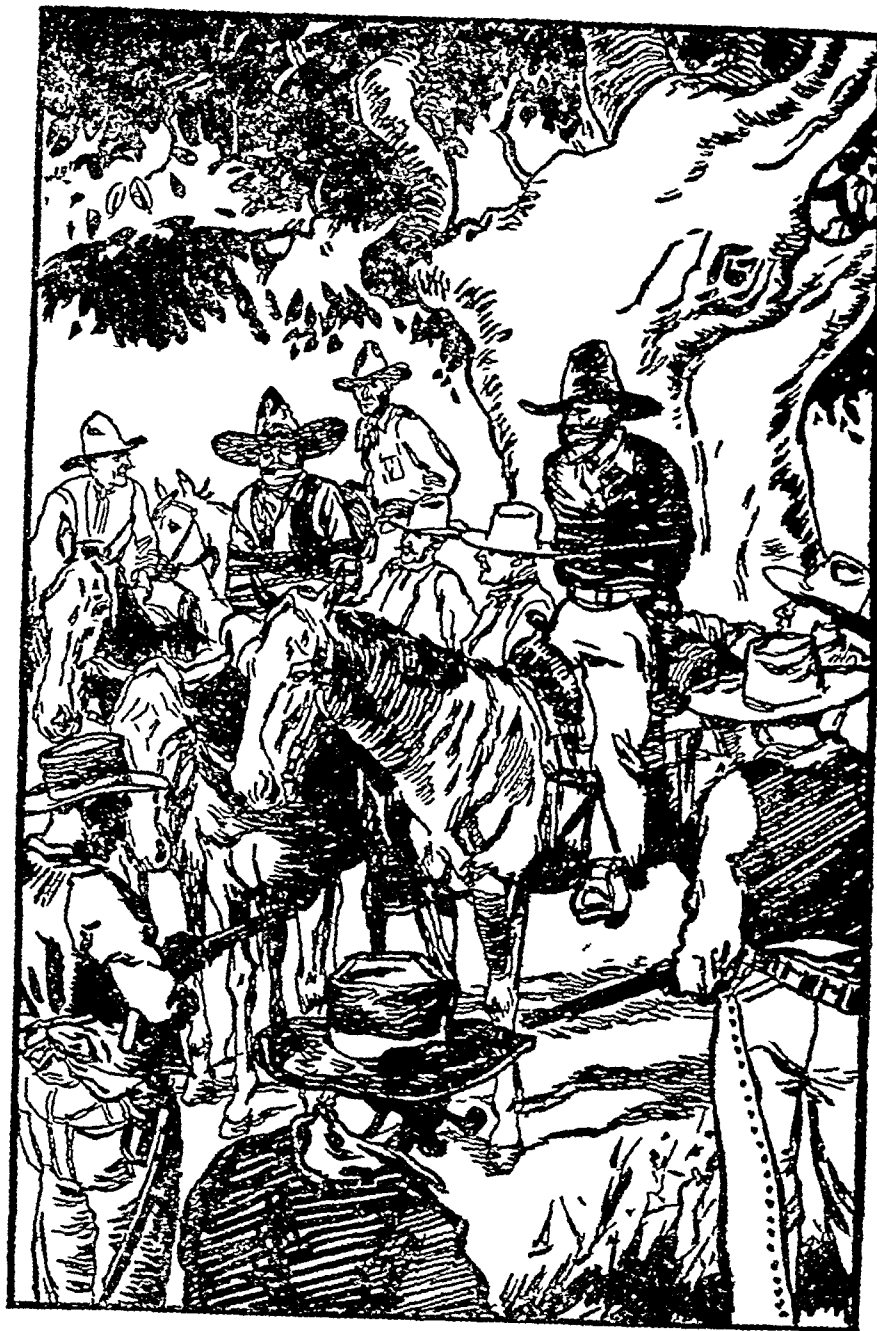
"SILVER-MASK"



I could see her terrified eyes in the beam of the torch

[See p 2

A TWILIGHT ADVENTURE



Two men sat on their horses, their elbows strapped to their bodies

THE IDOL HOUSE OF ASTARTE



"I am the Priestess of Astarte . . . I hold death in my hand"

[See p 347

THE MYSTERIOUS RAILWAY PASSENGER



My fellow-traveller, with one knee on my chest, was clutching my throat

THE AZTEC SKULL



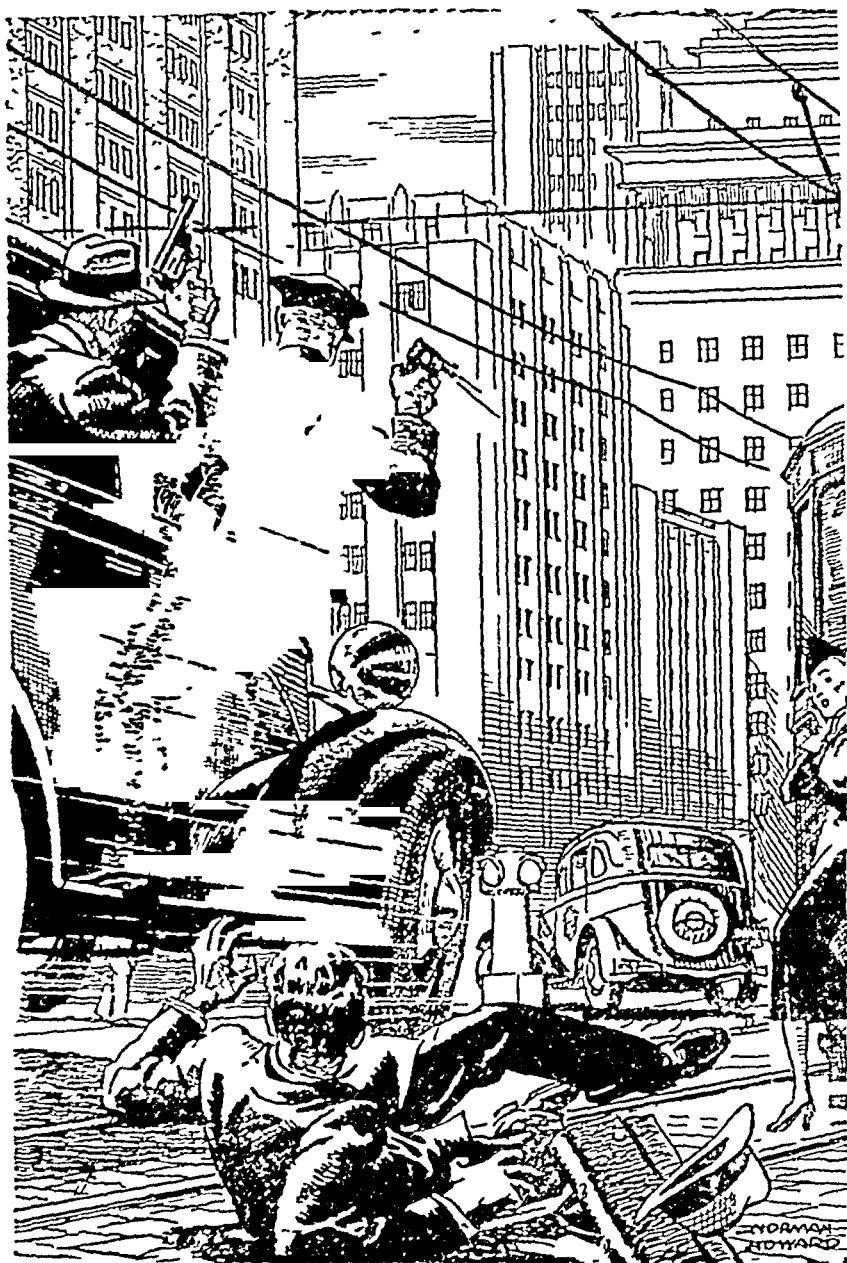
There were more shots, many shots.

THE CASE OF THE HUNDRED CATS



Out they came—Siamese, Persian, Tabby, Manx, males and females

THE RIDDLE OF THE JACK OF DIAMONDS



A service pistol cracked



Before he reached the god, she had fallen

[See p 611]

THE CASE OF THE TRAGEDIES IN 'THE GREEK ROOM



The figure of a woman draped in filmy white was passing across the Greek Room



Then he swung round again, his face ablaze with fury

[See p 670]

THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE STUDENTS

By

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

IT was in the year '95 that a combination of events, into which I need not enter, caused Mr Sherlock Holmes and myself to spend some weeks in one of our great University towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure which I am about to relate befell us. It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader to exactly identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive. So painful a scandal may well be allowed to die out. With due discretion the incident itself may, however, be described, since it serves to illustrate some of those qualities for which my friend was remarkable. I will endeavour in my statement to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place, or give a clue as to the people concerned.

We were residing at the time in furnished lodgings close to a library where Sherlock Holmes was pursuing some laborious researches in Early English charters—researches which led to results so striking that they may be the subject of one of my future narratives. Here it was that one evening we received a visit from an acquaintance, Mr Hilton Soames, tutor and lecturer at the College of St Luke's. Mr Soames was a tall, spare man, of a nervous and excitable temperament. I had always known him to be restless in his manner, but on this particular occasion he was in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that it was clear something very unusual had occurred.

"I trust Mr Holmes, that you can spare me a few hours of your valuable time. We have had a very painful incident at St Luke's, and really, but for the happy chance of your being in the town, I should have been at a loss what to do."

"I am very busy just now, and I desire no distractions," my friend answered. "I should much prefer that you called in the aid of the police."

"No, no, my dear sir, such a course is utterly impossible. When once the law is evoked it cannot be stayed again, and this is just one of those cases where, for the credit of the college, it is most essential to avoid scandal. Your discretion is as well known as your powers."

and you are the one man in the world who can help me I beg you, Mr. Holmes, to do what you can "

Mr friend's temper had not improved since he had been deprived of the congenial surroundings of Baker Street Without his scrap-books, his chemicals, and his homely untidiness, he was an uncomfortable man He shrugged his shoulders in ungracious acquiescence, while our visitor in hurried words and with much excitable gesticulation poured forth his story

"I must explain to you, Mr Holmes, that to-morrow is the first day of the examination for the Fortescue Scholarship I am one of the examiners My subject is Greek, and the first of the papers consists of a large passage of Greek translation which the candidate has not seen This passage is printed on the examination paper, and it would naturally be an immense advantage if the candidate could prepare it in advance For this reason great care is taken to keep the paper secret

"To-day about three o'clock the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers The exercise consists of half a chapter of Thucydides I had to read it over carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct At four-thirty my task was not yet completed I had, however, promised to take tea in a friend's rooms, so I left the proof upon my desk I was absent rather more than an hour You are aware, Mr Holmes, that our college doors are double—a green baize one within and a heavy oak one without As I approached my outer door I was amazed to see a key in it For an instant I imagined that I had left my own there, but on feeling in my pocket I found that it was all right The only duplicate which existed, so far as I knew, was that which belonged to my servant, Bannister, a man who has looked after my room for ten years, and whose honesty is absolutely above suspicion I found that the key was indeed his, that he had entered my room to know if I wanted tea, and that he had very carelessly left the key in the door when he came out His visit to my room must have been within a very few minutes of my leaving it His forgetfulness about the key would have mattered little upon any other occasion, but on this one day it has produced the most deplorable consequences

"The moment I looked at my table I was aware that some one had rummaged among my papers The proof was in three long slips I had left them all together Now I found that one of them was lying on the floor, one was on the side table near the window, and the third was where I had left it "

Holmes stirred for the first time

"The first page on the floor, the second in the window, and the third where you left it," said he

"Exactly, Mr Holmes You amaze me How could you possibly know that?"

"Pray continue your very interesting statement"

"For an instant I imagined that Bannister had taken the unpardonable liberty of examining my papers. He denied it, however, with the utmost earnestness, and I am convinced that he was speaking the truth. The alternative was that some one passing had observed the key in the door, had known that I was out, and had entered to look at the papers. A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one, and an unscrupulous man might very well run a risk in order to gain advantage over his fellows.

"Bannister was very much upset by the incident. He had nearly fainted when we found that the papers had undoubtedly been tampered with. I gave him a little brandy, and left him collapsed in a chair while I made a most careful examination of the room. I soon saw that the intruder had left other traces of his presence besides the rumpled papers. On the table in the window were several shreds from a pencil which had been sharpened. A broken tip of lead was lying there also. Evidently the rascal had copied the paper in a great hurry, had broken his pencil, and had been compelled to put a fresh point to it."

"Excellent!" said Holmes, who was recovering his good humour as his attention became more engrossed by the case. "Fortune has been your friend."

"This was not all. I have a new writing-table with a fine surface of red leather. I am prepared to swear, and so is Bannister, that it was smooth and unstained. Now I found a clean cut in it about three inches long—not a mere scratch, but a positive cut. Not only this, but on the table I found a small ball of black dough, or clay, with specks of something which looks like sawdust in it. I am convinced that these marks were left by the man who rifled the papers. There were no footmarks and no other evidence as to his identity. I was at my wits' end, when suddenly the happy thought occurred to me that you were in the town, and I came straight round to put the matter into your hands. Do help me, Mr Holmes! You see my dilemma. Either I must find the man, or else the examination must be postponed until fresh papers are prepared, and since this cannot be done without explanation, there will ensue a hideous scandal which will throw a cloud not only on the college but on the University. Above all things, I desire to settle the matter quietly and discreetly."

"I shall be happy to look into it and to give you such advice as I can," said Holmes, rising and putting on his overcoat. "This case is not entirely devoid of interest. Had any one visited you in your room after the papers came to you?"

"Yes, young Daulat Ras, an Indian student who lives on the

same stair, came in to ask me some particulars about the examination ”

“ For which he was entered ? ”

“ Yes ”

“ And the papers were on your table ? ”

“ To the best of my belief they were rolled up ”

“ But might be recognised as proofs ? ”

“ Possibly ”

“ No one else in your room ? ”

“ No ”

“ Did any one know that these proofs would be there ? ”

“ No one save the printer ”

“ Did this man Bannister know ? ”

“ No, certainly not No one knew ”

“ Where is Bannister now ? ”

“ He was very ill, poor fellow ! I left him collapsed in the chair I was in such a hurry to come to you ”

“ You left your door open ? ”

“ I locked the papers up first ”

“ Then it amounts to this, Mr Soames, that unless the Indian student recognised the roll as being proofs, the man who tampered with them came upon them accidentally without knowing that they was there ”

“ So it seems to me ”

Holmes gave an enigmatic smile

“ Well,” said he, “ let us go round Not one of your cases, Watson—mental, not physical All right, come if you want to Now, Mr Soames—at your disposal ! ”

The sitting-room of our client opened by a long, low, latticed window on to the ancient lichen-tinted court of the old college. A Gothic arched door led to a worn stone staircase. On the ground floor was the tutor’s room. Above were three students, one on each storey. It was already twilight when we reached the scene of our problem. Holmes halted and looked earnestly at the window. Then he approached it, and, standing on tiptoe, with his neck craned, he looked into the room.

“ He must have entered through the door. There is no opening except the one pane,” said our learned guide.

“ Dear me ! ” said Holmes, and he smiled in a singular way as he glanced at our companion. “ Well, if there is nothing to be learned here we had best go inside ”

The lecturer unlocked the outer door and ushered us into his room. We stood at the entrance while Holmes made an examination of the carpet.

“ I am afraid there are no signs here,” said he. “ One could hardly

hope for any upon so dry a day Your servant seems to have quite recovered You left him in a chair, you say, which chair?"

"By the window there"

"I see Near this little table You can come in now I have finished with the carpet Let us take the little table first Of course, what has happened is very clear The man entered and took the papers, sheet by sheet, from the central table He carried them over to the window table, because from there he could see if you came across the courtyard, and so could effect an escape"

"As a matter of fact, he could not," said Soames, "for I entered by the side door"

"Ah, that's good! Well, anyhow, that was in my mind Let me see the three strips No finger impressions—no! Well, he carried over this one first and he copied it How long would it take him to do that, using every possible contraction? A quarter of an hour, not less Then he tossed it down and seized the next He was in the midst of that when your return caused him to make a very hurried retreat—*very* hurried, since he had not time to replace the papers which would tell you that he had been there You were not aware of any hurrying feet on the stair as you entered the outer door?"

"No, I can't say I was"

"Well, he wrote so furiously that he broke his pencil and had, as you observe, to sharpen it again This is of interest, Watson The pencil was not an ordinary one It was about the usual size with a soft lead, the outer colour was dark blue, the maker's name was printed in silver lettering, and the piece remaining is only about an inch and a half long Look for such a pencil, Mr Soames, and you have got your man When I add that he possesses a large and very blunt knife, you have an additional aid"

Mr Soames was somewhat overwhelmed by this flood of information "I can follow the other points," said he, "but really in this matter of the length——"

Holmes held out a small chip with the letters NN and a space of clear wood after them

"You see?"

"No, I fear that even now——"

"Watson, I have always done you an injustice There are others What could this NN be? It is at the end of a word You are aware that Johann Faber is the most common maker's name Is it not clear that there is just as much of the pencil left as usually follows the Johann?" He held the small table sideways to the electric light "I was hoping that if the paper on which he wrote was thin some trace of it might come through upon this polished surface No, I see nothing I don't think there is anything more to be learned here Now for the central table This small pellet is, I presume,

the black, doughy mass you spoke of Roughly pyramidal in shape and hollowed out, I perceive As you say, there appear to be grains of sawdust in it Dear me, this is very interesting And the cut—a positive tear, I see It began with a thin scratch and ended in a jagged hole I am much indebted to you for directing my attention to this case, Mr Soames Where does that door lead to?”

“To my bedroom ”

“Have you been in it since your adventure?”

“No, I came straight away for you ”

“I should like to have a glance round What a charming, old-fashioned room! Perhaps you will kindly wait a minute until I have examined the floor No, I see nothing What about this curtain? You hang your clothes behind it If any one were forced to conceal himself in this room he must do it there, since the bed is too low and the wardrobe too shallow No one there, I suppose?”

As Holmes drew the curtain I was aware, from some little rigidity and alertness of his attitude, that he was prepared for an emergency As a matter of fact the drawn curtain disclosed nothing but three or four suits of clothes hanging from a line of pegs Holmes turned away, and stooped suddenly to the floor

“Halloa! What’s this?” said he

It was a small pyramid of black, putty-like stuff, exactly like the one upon the table of the study Holmes held it out on his open palm in the glare of the electric light

“Your visitor seems to have left traces in your bedroom as well as in your sitting-room, Mr Soames ”

“What could he have wanted there?”

“I think it is clear enough You came back by an unexpected way, and so he had no warning until you were at the very door What could he do? He caught up everything which would betray him, and he rushed into your bedroom to conceal himself ”

“Good gracious, Mr Holmes, do you mean to tell me that all the time I was talking to Bannister in this room we had the man prisoner if we had only known it?”

“So I read it ”

“Surely there is another alternative, Mr Holmes? I don’t know whether you observed my bedroom window ”

“Lattice-paned, lead framework, three separate windows, one swinging on hinges and large enough to admit a man ”

“Exactly And it looks out on an angle of the courtyard so as to be partly invisible The man might have effected his entrance there, left traces as he passed through the bedroom, and, finally, finding the door open, have escaped that way ”

Holmes shook his head impatiently

“Let us be practical,” said he “I understand you to say that there

are three students who use this stair and are in the habit of passing your door?"

"Yes, there are "

"And they are all in for this examination?"

"Yes "

"Have you any reason to suspect any one of them more than the others?"

Soames hesitated

"It is a very delicate question," said he "One hardly likes to throw suspicion where there are no proofs "

"Let us hear the suspicions I will look after the proofs "

"I will tell you, then, in a few words, the character of the three men who inhabit these rooms The lower of the three is Gilchrist, a fine scholar and athlete, plays in the Rugby team and the cricket team for the college, and got his Blue for the hurdles and the long jump He is a fine manly fellow His father was the notorious Sir Jabez Gilchrist, who ruined himself on the Turf My scholar has been left very poor, but he is hard-working and industrious He will do well

"The second floor is inhabited by Daulat Ras, the Indian He is a quiet, inscrutable fellow, as most of those Indians are He is well up in his work, though his Greek is his weak subject He is steady and methodical

"The top floor belongs to Miles McLaren He is a brilliant fellow when he chooses to work—one of the brightest intellects of the University, but he is wayward, dissipated, and unprincipled He was nearly expelled over a card scandal in his first year He has been idling all this term, and he must look forward with dread to the examination "

"Then it is he whom you suspect?"

"I dare not go so far as that But of the three he is perhaps the least unlikely "

"Exactly Now, Mr Soames, let us have a look at your servant, Bannister "

He was a little, white-faced, clean-shaven, grizzly-haired fellow of fifty He was still suffering from this sudden disturbance of the quiet routine of his life His plump face was twitching with his nervousness, and his fingers could not keep still

"We are investigating this unhappy business, Bannister," said his master

"Yes, sir "

"I understand," said Holmes, "that you left your key in the door?"

"Yes, sir "

"Was it not very extraordinary that you should do this on the very day when there were these papers inside?"

"It was most unfortunate, sir But I have occasionally done the same thing at other times "

"When did you enter the room?"

"It was about half-past four That is Mr Soames's tea-time "

"How long did you stay?"

"When I saw that he was absent I withdrew at once "

"Did you look at these papers on the table?"

"No, sir, certainly not "

"How came you to leave the key in the door?"

"I had the tea-tray in my hand I thought I would come back for the key Then I forgot "

"Has the outer door a spring lock?"

"No, sir "

"Then it was open all the time?"

"Yes, sir "

"Any one in the room could get out?"

"Yes, sir "

"When Mr Soames returned and called for you, you were very much disturbed?"

"Yes, sir Such a thing has never happened during the many years that I have been here I nearly fainted, sir "

"So I understand Where were you when you began to feel bad?"

"Where was I, sir? Why, here, near the door "

"That is singular, because you sat down in that chair over yonder near the corner Why did you pass these other chairs?"

"I really don't know, sir It didn't matter to me where I sat "

"I really don't think he knew much about it, Mr Holmes He was looking very bad—quite ghastly "

"You stayed here when your master left?"

"Only for a minute or so Then I locked the door and went to my room "

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Oh, I would not venture to say, sir I don't believe there is any gentlemen in this University who is capable of profiting by such an action No, sir, I'll not believe it "

"Thank you, that will do," said Holmes "Oh, one more word You have not mentioned to any of the three gentlemen whom you attend that anything is amiss?"

"No, sir, not a word "

"You haven't seen any of them?"

"No, sir "

"Very good Now, Mr Soames, we will take a walk in the quadrangle, if you please "

Three yellow squares of light shone above us in the gathering gloom

"Your three birds are all in their nests," said Holmes, looking

up "Halloa! What's that? One of them seems restless enough"

It was the Indian, whose dark silhouette appeared suddenly upon the blind. He was pacing swiftly up and down his room.

"I should like to have a peep at each of them," said Holmes "Is it possible?"

"No difficulty in the world," Soames answered "This set of rooms is quite the oldest in the college, and it is not unusual for visitors to go over them. Come along, and I will personally conduct you."

"No names, please!" said Holmes, as we knocked at Gilchrist's door. A tall, flaxen-haired, slim young fellow opened it, and made us welcome when he understood our errand. There were some really curious pieces of mediæval domestic architecture within. Holmes was so charmed with one of them that he insisted on drawing it on his notebook, broke his pencil, had to borrow one from our host, and finally borrowed a knife to sharpen his own. The same curious accident happened to him in the rooms of the Indian—a silent little hook-nosed fellow, who eyed us askance and was obviously glad when Holmes's architectural studies had come to an end. I could not see that in either case Holmes had come upon the clue for which he was searching. Only at the third did our visit prove abortive. The outer door would not open to our knock, and nothing more substantial than a torrent of bad language came from behind it. "I don't care who you are. You can go to blazes!" roared the angry voice. "To-morrow's the exam, and I won't be drawn by any one."

"A rude fellow," said our guide, flushing with anger as we withdrew down the stair. "Of course, he did not realise that it was I who was knocking, but none the less his conduct was very uncourteous, and, indeed, under the circumstances, rather suspicious."

Holmes's response was a curious one.

"Can you tell me his exact height?" he asked.

"Really, Mr Holmes, I cannot undertake to say. He is taller than the Indian, not so tall as Gilchrist. I suppose five foot six would be about it."

"That is very important," said Holmes. "And now, Mr Soames, I wish you good-night."

Our guide cried aloud in his astonishment and dismay. "Good gracious, Mr Holmes, you are surely not going to leave me in this abrupt fashion! You don't seem to realise the position. To-morrow is the examination. I must take some definite action to-night. I cannot allow the examination to be held if one of the papers has been tampered with. The situation must be faced."

"You must leave it as it is. I shall drop round early to-morrow morning and chat the matter over. It is possible that I may be

in a position then to indicate some course of action. Meanwhile you change nothing—nothing at all.”

“Very good, Mr. Holmes.”

“You can be perfectly easy in your mind. We shall certainly find some way out of your difficulties. I will take the black clay with me, also the pencil cuttings. Good-bye.”

When we were out in the darkness of the quadrangle we again looked up at the windows. The Indian still paced his room. The others were invisible.

“Well, Watson, what do you think of it?” Holmes asked as we came out into the main street. “Quite a little parlour game—sort of three-card trick, is it not? There are your three men. It must be one of them. You take your choice. Which is yours?”

“The foul-mouthed fellow at the top. He is the one with the worst record. And yet that Indian was a sly fellow also. Why should he be pacing his room all the time?”

“There is nothing in that. Many men do it when they are trying to learn anything by heart.”

“He looked at us in a queer way.”

“So would you if a flock of strangers came in on you when you were preparing for an examination next day, and every moment was of value. No, I see nothing in that. Pencils, too, and knives—all was satisfactory. But that fellow *does* puzzle me.”

“Who?”

“Why, Bannister, the servant. What’s his game in the matter?”

“He impressed me as being a perfectly honest man.”

“So he did me. That’s the puzzling part. Why should a perfectly honest man—well, here’s a large stationer’s. We shall begin our researches here.”

There were only four stationers of any consequence in the town, and at each Holmes produced his pencil chips and bid high for a duplicate. All were agreed that one could be ordered, but that it was not a usual size of pencil, and that it was seldom kept in stock. My friend did not appear to be depressed by his failure, but shrugged his shoulders in half-humorous resignation.

“No good, my dear Watson. This, the best and only final clue, has run to nothing. But, indeed, I have little doubt that we can build up a sufficient case without it. By Jove! my dear fellow, it is nearly nine, and the landlady babbled of green peas at seven-thirty. What with your eternal tobacco, Watson, and your irregularity at meals, I expect that you will get notice to quit, and that I shall share your downfall—not, however, before we have solved the problem of the nervous tutor, the careless servant, and the three enterprising students.”

Holmes made no further allusion to the matter that day, though

he sat lost in thought for a long time after our belated dinner
At eight in the morning he came into my room just as I finished my toilet

"Well, Watson," said he, "it is time we went down to St Luke's
Can you do without breakfast?"

"Certainly "

"Soames will be in a dreadful fidget until we are able to tell him something positive "

"Have you anything positive to tell him?"

"I think so "

"You have formed a conclusion?"

"Yes, my dear Watson, I have solved the mystery "

"But what fresh evidence could you have got?"

"Aha! It is not for nothing that I have turned myself out of bed at the untimely hour of six I have put in two hours' hard work and covered at least five miles, with something to show for it Look at that!"

He held out his hand On the palm were three little pyramids of black, doughy clay

"Why, Holmes, you had only two yesterday!"

"And one more this morning It is a fair argument, that wherever No 3 came from is also the source of Nos 1 and 2 Eh, Watson? Well, come along and put friend Soames out of his pain "

The unfortunate tutor was certainly in a state of pitiable agitation when we found him in his chambers In a few hours the examinations would commence, and he was still in the dilemma between making the facts public and allowing the culprit to compete for the valuable scholarship He could hardly stand still, so great was his mental agitation, and he ran towards Holmes with two eager hands outstretched

"Thank Heaven that you have come! I feared that you had given it up in despair What am I to do? Shall the examination proceed?"

"Yes, let it proceed, by all means "

"But this rascal——?"

"He shall not compete "

"You know him?"

"I think so If this matter is not to become public we must give ourselves certain powers, and resolve ourselves into a small private court-martial You there, if you please, Soames! Watson, you here! I'll take the arm-chair in the middle I think that we are now sufficiently imposing to strike terror into a guilty breast Kindly ring the bell!"

Bannister entered, and shrank back in evident surprise and fear at our judicial appearance

"You will kindly close the door," said Holmes "Now, Bannister, will you please tell us the truth about yesterday's incident?"

The man turned white to the roots of his hair

"I have told you everything, sir "

"Nothing to add?"

"Nothing at all, sir "

"Well, then, I must make some suggestions to you When you sat down on that chair yesterday, did you do so in order to conceal some object which would have shown who had been in the room?"

Bannister's face was ghastly

"No, sir, certainly not "

"It is only a suggestion," said Holmes suavely "I frankly admit that I am unable to prove it But it seems probable enough, since the moment that Mr Soames's back was turned you released the man who was hiding in that bedroom "

Bannister licked his dry lips

"There was no man, sir "

"Ah, that's a pity, Bannister Up to now you may have spoken the truth but now I know that you have lied "

The man's face set in sullen defiance

"There was no man, sir,"

"Come, come, Bannister "

"No, sir, there was no one "

"In that case you can give us no further information Would you please remain in the room? Stand over there near the bedroom door Now, Soames, I am going to ask you to have the great kindness to go up to the room of young Gilchrist, and to ask him to step down into yours "

An instant later the tutor returned, bringing with him the student He was a fine figure of a man, tall, lithe, and agile, with a springy step and a pleasant, open face His troubled blue eyes glanced at each of us, and finally rested with an expression of blank dismay upon Bannister in the farther corner

"Just close the door," said Holmes "Now, Mr. Gilchrist, we are all quite alone here, and no one need ever know one word of what passes between us We can be perfectly frank with each other We want to know, Mr Gilchrist, how you, an honourable man, ever came to commit such an action as that of yesterday?"

The unfortunate young man staggered back, and cast a look full of horror and reproach at Bannister

"No, no, Mr Gilchrist, sir, I never said a word—never one word!" cried the servant

"No, but you have now," said Holmes "Now, sir, you must see that after Bannister's words your position is hopeless, and that your only chance lies in a frank confession "

For a moment Gilchrist, with upraised hand, tried to control

his writhing features. The next he had thrown himself on his knees beside the table, and, burying his face in his hands, he burst into a storm of passionate sobbing.

"Come, come," said Holmes kindly, "it is human to err, and at least no one can accuse you of being a callous criminal. Perhaps it would be easier for you if I were to tell Mr Soames what occurred, and you can check me where I am wrong. Shall I do so? Well, well, don't trouble to answer. Listen, and see that I do you no injustice.

"From the moment Mr Soames, that you said to me that no one, not even Bannister, could have told that the papers were in your room, the case began to take a definite shape in my mind. The printer one could, of course, dismiss. He could examine the papers in his own office. The Indian I also thought nothing of. If the proofs were in roll he could not possibly know what they were. On the other hand, it seemed an unthinkable coincidence that a man should dare to enter the room, and that by chance on that very day the papers were on the table. I dismissed that. The man who entered knew that the papers were there. How did he know?

"When I approached your room I examined the window. You amused me by supposing that I was contemplating the possibility of some one having in broad daylight, under the eyes of all these opposite rooms, forced himself through it. Such an idea was absurd. I was measuring how tall a man would need to be in order to see as he passed what papers were on the central table. I am six feet high, and I could do it with an effort. No one less than that would have a chance. Already, you see, I had reason to think that if one of your three students was a man of unusual height he was the most worth watching of the three.

"I entered, and I took you into my confidence as to the suggestions of the side table. Of the centre table I could make nothing, until in your description of Gilchrist you mentioned that he was a long-distance jumper. Then the whole thing came to me in an instant, and I only needed certain corroborative proofs, which I speedily obtained.

"What happened was this. This young fellow had employed his afternoon at the athletic grounds, where he had been practising the jump. He returned carrying his jumping shoes, which are provided, as you are aware, with several spikes. As he passed your window he saw, by means of his great height, these proofs upon your table, and conjectured what they were. No harm would have been done had it not been that as he passed your door he perceived the key which had been left by the carelessness of your servant. A sudden impulse came over him to enter and see if they were indeed the proofs. It was not a dangerous exploit, for he could always pretend that he had simply looked in to ask a question.

"Well, when he saw that they were indeed the proofs, it was then that he yielded to temptation. He put his shoes on the table. What was it you put on that chair near the window?"

"Gloves," said the young man.

Holmes looked triumphantly at Bannister.

"He put his gloves on the chair, and he took the proofs, sheet by sheet, to copy them. He thought the tutor must return by the main gate, and that he would see him. As we know, he came back by the side gate. Suddenly he heard him at the very door. There was no possible escape. He forgot his gloves, but he caught up his shoes and darted into the bedroom. You observe that the scratch on that table is slight at one side, but deepens in the direction of the bedroom door. That in itself is enough to show us that the shoes had been drawn in that direction, and that the culprit had taken refuge there. The earth round the spike had been left on the table, and a second sample was loosened and fell in the bedroom. I may add that I walked out to the athletic grounds this morning, saw that tenacious black clay is used in the jumping pit, and carried away a specimen of it, together with some of the fine tan or sawdust which is strewn over it to prevent the athlete from slipping. Have I told the truth, Mr Gilchrist?"

The student had drawn himself erect.

"Yes, sir, it is true," said he.

"Good heavens, have you nothing to add?" cried Soames.

"Yes, sir, I have, but the shock of this disgraceful exposure has bewildered me. I have a letter here, Mr Soames, which I wrote to you early this morning in the middle of a restless night. It was before I knew that my sin had found me out. Here it is, sir. You will see that I have said, 'I have determined not to go in for the examination. I have been offered a commission in the Rhodesian Police, and I am going out to South Africa at once.'"

"I am indeed pleased to hear that you did not intend to profit by your unfair advantage," said Soames. "But why did you change your purpose?"

Gilchrist pointed to Bannister.

"There is the man who sent me in the right path," said he.

"Come now, Bannister," said Holmes. "It will be clear to you from what I have said that only you could have let this young man out, since you were left in the room and must have locked the door when you went out. As to his escaping by that window, it was incredible. Can you not clear up the last point in this mystery, and tell us the reason for your action?"

"It was simple enough, sir, if you only had known, but with all your cleverness it was impossible that you could know. Time was, sir, when I was butler to old Sir Jabez Gilchrist, this young gentleman's father. When he was ruined I came to the college as

servant, but I never forgot my old employer because he was down in the world. I watched his son all I could for the sake of the old days. Well, sir, when I came into this room yesterday when the alarm was given, the first thing I saw was Mr Gilchrist's tan gloves a-lying in that chair. I knew those gloves well, and I understood their message. If Mr Soames saw them the game was up. I flopped down into that chair, and nothing would budge me until Mr Soames he went for you. Then out came my poor young master, whom I had dandled on my knee, and confessed it all to me. Wasn't it natural, sir, that I should save him, and wasn't it natural also that I should try to speak to him as his dead father would have done, and make him understand that he could not profit by such a deed? Could you blame me, sir?"

"No, indeed!" said Holmes heartily, springing to his feet. "Well, Soames, I think we have cleared your little problem up, and our breakfast awaits us at home. Come, Watson! As to you, sir, I trust that a bright future awaits you in Rhodesia. For once you have fallen low. Let us see in the future how high you can rise."

Lord Peter Wimsey

THE NECKLACE OF PEARLS

By

DOROTHY L SAYERS

SIR SEPTIMUS SHALE was accustomed to assert his authority once in the year and once only. He allowed his young and fashionable wife to fill his house with diagrammatic furniture made of steel, to collect advanced artists and anti-grammatical poets, to believe in cocktails and relativity and to dress as extravagantly as she pleased, but he did insist on an old-fashioned Christmas. He was a simple-hearted man, who really liked plum-pudding and cracker mottoes, and he could not get it out of his head that other people, "at bottom," enjoyed these things also. At Christmas, therefore, he firmly retired to his country house in Essex, called in the servants to hang holly and mistletoe upon the cubist electric fittings, loaded the steel sideboard with delicacies from Fortnum & Mason, hung up stockings at the heads of the polished walnut bedsteads, and even, on this occasion only, had the electric radiators removed from the modernist grates and installed wood fires and a Yule log. He then gathered his family and friends about him, filled them with as much Dickensian good fare as he could persuade them to swallow, and, after their Christmas dinner, set them down to play "Charades" and "Clumps" and "Animal, Vegetable and Mineral" in the drawing-room, concluding these diversions by "Hide-and-Seek" in the dark all over the house. Because Sir Septimus was a very rich man, his guests fell in with this invariable programme, and if they were bored, they did not tell him so.

Another charming and traditional custom which he followed was that of presenting to his daughter Margharita a pearl on each successive birthday—this anniversary happening to coincide with Christmas Eve. The pearls now numbered twenty, and the collection was beginning to enjoy a certain celebrity, and had been photographed in the Society papers. Though not sensationally large—each one being about the size of a marrowfat pea—the pearls were of very great value. They were of exquisite colour and perfect shape and matched to a hair's weight. On this particular Christmas Eve, the presentation of the twenty-first pearl had been the occasion of a very special ceremony. There was a dance

and there were speeches. On the Christmas night following, the more restricted family party took place, with the turkey and the Victorian games. There were eleven guests, in addition to Sir Septimus and Lady Shale and their daughter, nearly all related or connected to them in some way. John Shale, a brother, with his wife and their son and daughter Henry and Betty, Betty's *fiancé*, Oswald Truegood, a young man with parliamentary ambitions, George Comphrey, a cousin of Lady Shale's, aged about thirty and known as a man about town, Lavinia Prescott, asked on George's account, Joyce Trivett, asked on Henry Shale's account, Richard and Beryl Dennison, distant relations of Lady Shale, who lived a gay and expensive life in town on nobody precisely knew what resources, and Lord Peter Wimsey, asked, in a touching spirit of unreasonable hope, on Margharita's account. There were also, of course, William Norgate, secretary to Sir Septimus, and Miss Tomkins, secretary to Lady Shale, who had to be there because, without their calm efficiency, the Christmas arrangements could not have been carried through.

Dinner was over—a seemingly endless succession of soup, fish, turkey, roast beef, plum-pudding, mince-pies, crystallised fruit, nuts and five kinds of wine, presided over by Sir Septimus, all smiles, by Lady Shale, all mocking depreciation, and by Margharita, pretty and bored, with the necklace of twenty-one pearls gleaming softly on her slender throat. Gorged and dyspeptic and longing only for the horizontal position, the company had been shepherded into the drawing-room and set to play "Musical Chairs" (Miss Tomkins at the piano), "Hunt the Slipper" (slipper provided by Miss Tomkins), and "Dumb Crambo" (costumes by Miss Tomkins and Mr William Norgate). The back drawing-room (for Sir Septimus clung to these old-fashioned names) provided an admirable dressing-room, being screened by folding doors from the large drawing-room in which the audience sat on aluminium chairs, scrabbling uneasy toes on a floor of black glass under the tremendous illumination of electricity reflected from a brass ceiling.

It was William Norgate who, after taking the temperature of the meeting, suggested to Lady Shale that they should play at something less athletic. Lady Shale agreed and, as usual, suggested bridge. Sir Septimus, as usual, blew the suggestion aside.

"Bridge? Nonsense! Nonsense! Play bridge every day of your lives. This is Christmas time. Something we can all play together. How about 'Animal, Vegetable and Mineral'?"

This intellectual pastime was a favourite with Sir Septimus, he was rather good at putting pregnant questions. After a brief discussion, it became evident that this game was an inevitable part of the programme. The party settled down to it, Sir Septimus undertaking to "go out" first and set the thing going.

Presently they had guessed among other things Miss Tomkins's mother's photograph, a gramophone record of "I want to be happy" (much scientific research into the exact composition of records, settled by William Norgate out of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the smallest stickleback in the stream at the bottom of the garden, the new planet Pluto, the scarf worn by Mrs Dennison (very confusing, because it was not silk, which would be animal, or artificial silk, which would be vegetable, but made of spun glass—mineral, a very clever choice of subject), and had failed to guess the Prime Minister's wireless speech—which was voted not fair, since nobody could decide whether it was animal by nature or a kind of gas. It was decided that they should do one more word and then go on to "Hide-and-Seek." Oswald Truegood had retired into the back room and shut the door behind him while the party discussed the next subject of examination, when suddenly Sir Septimus broke in on the argument by calling to his daughter.

"Hullo, Margy! What have you done with your necklace?"

"I took it off, Dad, because I thought it might get broken in 'Dum Crambo.' It's over here on this table. No, it isn't. Did you take it, mother?"

"No, I didn't. If I'd seen it, I should have. You are a careless child."

"I believe you've got it yourself, Dad. You're teasing."

Sir Septimus denied the accusation with some energy. Everybody got up and began to hunt about. There were not many places in that bare and polished room where a necklace could be hidden. After ten minutes' fruitless investigation, Richard Dennison, who had been seated next to the table where the pearls had been placed, began to look rather uncomfortable.

"Awkward, you know," he remarked to Wimsey.

At this moment, Oswald Truegood put his head through the folding-doors and asked whether they hadn't settled on something by now, because he was getting the fidgets.

This directed the attention of the searchers to the inner room. Margharita must have been mistaken. She had taken it in there, and it had got mixed up with the dressing-up clothes somehow. The room was ransacked. Everything was lifted up and shaken. The thing began to look serious. After half an hour of desperate energy it became apparent that the pearls were nowhere to be found.

"They must be somewhere in these two rooms, you know," said Wimsey. "The back drawing-room has no door and nobody could have gone out of the front drawing-room without being seen. Unless the windows——"

No. The windows were all guarded on the outside by heavy shutters which it needed two footmen to take down and replace.

The pearls had not gone out that way. In fact, the mere suggestion that they had left the drawing-room at all was disagreeable. Because—because——

It was William Norgate, efficient as ever, who coldly and boldly faced the issue.

"I think, Sir Septimus, it would be a relief to the minds of everybody present if we could all be searched."

Sir Septimus was horrified, but the guests, having found a leader, backed up Norgate. The door was locked, and the search was conducted—the ladies in the inner room and the men in the outer.

Nothing resulted from it except some very interesting information about the belongings habitually carried about by the average man and woman. It was natural that Lord Peter Wimsey should possess a pair of forceps, a pocket lens and a small folding foot-rule—was he not a Sherlock Holmes in high life? But that Oswald Truegood should have two liver-pills in a screw of paper and Henry Shale a pocket edition of *The Odes of Horace* was unexpected. Why did John Shale distend the pockets of his dress-suit with a stump of red sealing-wax, an ugly little mascot and a five-shilling piece? George Comphrey had a pair of folding scissors, and three wrapped lumps of sugar, of the sort served in restaurants and dining-cars—evidence of a not uncommon form of kleptomania, but that the tidy and exact Norgate should burden himself with a reel of white cotton, three separate lengths of string and twelve safety-pins on a card seemed really remarkable till one remembered that he had superintended all the Christmas decorations. Richard Dennison, amid some confusion and laughter, was found to cherish a lady's garter, a powder-compact and half a potato, the last-named, he said, was a prophylactic against rheumatism (to which he was subject), while the other objects belonged to his wife. On the ladies' side, the more striking exhibits were a little book on palmistry, three invisible hair-pins and a baby's photograph (Miss Tomkins), a Chinese trick cigarette-case with a secret compartment (Beryl Dennison), a *very* private letter and an outfit for mending stocking-ladders (Lavinia Prescott), and a pair of eyebrow tweezers and a small packet of white powder, said to be for headaches (Betty Shale). An agitating moment followed the production from Joyce Trivett's handbag of a small string of pearls—but it was promptly remembered that these had come out of one of the crackers at dinner-time, and they were, in fact, synthetic. In short, the search was unproductive of anything beyond a general shamefacedness and the discomfort always produced by undressing and re-dressing in a hurry at the wrong time of the day.

It was then that somebody, very grudgingly and haltingly, mentioned the horrid word "Police." Sir Septimus, naturally, was

appalled by the idea. It was disgusting. He would not allow it. The pearls must be somewhere. They must search the rooms again. Could not Lord Peter Wimsey, with his experience of—er—mysterious happenings, do something to assist them?

"Eh?" said his lordship. "Oh, by Jove, yes—by all means, certainly. That is to say, provided nobody supposes—eh, what? I mean to say, you don't know that I'm not a suspicious character, do you, what?"

Lady Shale interposed with authority.

"We don't think *anybody* ought to be suspected," she said, "but, if we did, we'd know it couldn't be you. You know *far* too much about crimes to want to commit one."

"All right," said Wimsey. "But after the way the place has been gone over——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, I'm afraid you won't be able to find any footprints," said Margharita. "But we may have overlooked something."

Wimsey nodded.

"I'll try. Do you all mind sitting down on your chairs in the outer room and staying there. All except one of you—I'd better have a witness to anything I do or find. Sir Septimus—you'd be the best person, I think."

He shepherded them to their places and began a slow circuit of the two rooms, exploring every surface, gazing up to the polished brazen ceiling, and crawling on hands and knees in the approved fashion across the black and shining desert of the floors. Sir Septimus followed, staring when Wimsey stared, bending with his hands upon his knees when Wimsey crawled, and puffing at intervals with astonishment and chagrin. Their progress rather resembled that of a man taking out a very inquisitive puppy for a very leisurely constitutional. Fortunately, Lady Shale's taste in furnishing made investigation easier; there were scarcely any nooks or corners where anything could be concealed.

They reached the inner drawing-room, and here the dressing-up clothes were again minutely examined, but without result. Finally, Wimsey lay down flat on his stomach to squint under a steel cabinet which was one of the very few pieces of furniture which possessed short legs. Something about it seemed to catch his attention. He rolled up his sleeve and plunged his arm into the cavity, kicked convulsively in the effort to reach farther than was humanly possible, pulled out from his pocket and extended his folding foot-rule, fished with it under the cabinet and eventually succeeded in extracting what he sought.

It was a very minute object—in fact, a pin. Not an ordinary pin, but one resembling those used by entomologists to impale extremely small moths on the setting-board. It was about three-

quarters of an inch in length, as fine as a very fine needle, with a sharp point, and a particularly small head

"Bless my soul!" said Sir Septimus "What's that?"

"Does anybody here happen to collect moths or beetles or anything?" asked Wimsey, squatting on his haunches and examining the pin.

"I'm pretty sure they don't," replied Sir Septimus "I'll ask them"

"Don't do that" Wimsey bent his head and stared at the floor, from which his own face stared meditatively back at him

"I see," said Wimsey presently. "That's how it was done. All right, Sir Septimus I know where the pearls are, but I don't know who took them Perhaps it would be as well—for everybody's satisfaction—just to find out In the meantime they are perfectly safe Don't tell any one that we've found this pin or that we've discovered anything Send all these people to bed Lock the drawing-room door and keep the key, and we'll get our man—or woman—by breakfast-time"

"God bless my soul," said Sir Septimus, very much puzzled

Lord Peter Wimsey kept careful watch that night upon the drawing-room door Nobody, however, came near it Either the thief suspected a trap or he felt confident that any time would do to recover the pearls Wimsey, however, did not feel that he was wasting his time He was making a list of people who had been left alone in the back drawing-room during the playing of "Animal, Vegetable or Mineral" The list ran as follows

Sir Septimus Shale

Lavinia Prescott

William Norgate

Joyce Trivett and Henry Shale (together, because they had claimed to be incapable of guessing anything unaided)

Mrs Dennison

Betty Shale

George Comphrey

Richard Dennison

Miss Tomkins

Oswald Truegood.

He also made out a list of the persons to whom pearls might be useful or desirable. Unfortunately, this list agreed in almost all respects with the first (always excepting Sir Septimus) and so was not very helpful The two secretaries had both come well recommended, but that was exactly what they would have done had they come with ulterior designs, the Dennisons were notorious livers

from hand to mouth, Betty Shale carried mysterious white powders in her handbag, and was known to be in with a rather rapid set in town, Henry was a harmless dilettante, but Joyce Trivett could twist him round her little finger and was what Jane Austen liked to call "expensive and dissipated", Comphrey speculated, Oswald Truegood was rather frequently present at Epsom and Newmarket—the search for motives was only too fatally easy

When the second housemaid and the under-footman appeared in the passage with household implements, Wimsey abandoned his vigil, but he was down early to breakfast. Sir Septimus with his wife and daughter were down before him, and a certain air of tension made itself felt. Wimsey, standing on the hearth before the fire, made conversation about the weather and politics

The party assembled gradually, but, as though by common consent, nothing was said about pearls until after breakfast, when Oswald Truegood took the bull by the horns

"Well now!" said he "How's the detective getting along? Got your man, Wimsey?"

"Not yet," said Wimsey easily

Sir Septimus, looking at Wimsey as though for his cue, cleared his throat and dashed into speech

"All very tiresome," he said, "all very unpleasant. Hr'm Nothing for it but the police, I'm afraid. Just at Christmas, too. Hr'm Spoilt the party. Can't stand seeing all this stuff about the place." He waved his hand towards the festoons of evergreens and coloured paper that adorned the walls. "Take it all down, eh, what? No heart in it. Hr'm Burn the lot."

"What a pity, when we worked so hard over it," said Joyce

"Oh, leave it, Uncle," said Henry Shale. "You're bothering too much about the pearls. They're sure to turn up."

"Shall I ring for James?" suggested William Norgate

"No," interrupted Comphrey, "let's do it ourselves. It'll give us something to do and take our minds off our troubles."

"That's right," said Sir Septimus. "Start right away. Hate the sight of it."

He savagely hauled a great branch of holly down from the mantelpiece and flung it, crackling, into the fire

"That's the stuff," said Richard Dennison. "Make a good old blaze!" He leapt up from the table and snatched the mistletoe from the chandelier. "Here goes! One more kiss for somebody before it's too late."

"Isn't it unlucky to take it down before the New Year?" suggested Miss Tomkins

"Unlucky be hanged. We'll have it all down. Off the stairs and out of the drawing-room too. Somebody go and collect it."

"Isn't the drawing-room locked?" asked Oswald

"No Lord Peter says the pearls aren't there, wherever else they are, so it's unlocked That's right, isn't it, Wimsey?"

"Quite right The pearls were taken out of these rooms I can't yet tell you how, but I'm positive of it. In fact, I'll pledge my reputation that wherever they are, they're not up there"

"Oh, well," said Comphrey, "in that case, have at it! Come along, Lavinia—you and Dennison do the drawing-room and I'll do the back room We'll have a race"

"But if the police are coming in," said Dennison, "oughtn't everything to be left just as it is?"

"Damn the police!" shouted Sir Septimus "They don't want evergreens."

Oswald and Margharita were already pulling the holly and ivy from the staircase, amid peals of laughter The party dispersed Wimsey went quietly upstairs and into the drawing-room, where the work of demolition was taking place at a great rate, George having bet the other two ten shillings to a tanner that they would not finish their part of the job before he finished his

"You mustn't help," said Lavinia, laughing, to Wimsey "It wouldn't be fair"

Wimsey said nothing, but waited till the room was clear Then he followed them down again to the hall, where the fire was sending up a great roaring and spluttering, suggestive of Guy Fawkes night He whispered to Sir Septimus, who went forward and touched George Comphrey on the shoulder

"Lord Peter wants to say something to you, my boy," he said

Comphrey started and went with him a little reluctantly, as it seemed He was not looking very well

"Mr Comphrey," said Wimsey, "I fancy these are some of your property" He held out the palm of his hand, in which rested twenty-two fine, small-headed pins

"Ingenious," said Wimsey, "but something less ingenious would have served his turn better It was very unlucky, Sir Septimus, that you should have mentioned the pearls when you did Of course, he hoped that the loss wouldn't be discovered till we'd chucked guessing games and taken to 'Hide-and-Seek' Then the pearls might have been anywhere in the house, we shouldn't have locked the drawing-room door, and he could have recovered them at his leisure He had had this possibility in his mind when he came here, obviously, and that was why he brought the pins, and Miss Shale's taking off the necklace to play 'Dumb Crambo' gave him his opportunity

"He had spent Christmas here before, and knew perfectly well that 'Animal, Vegetable and Mineral' would form part of the

entertainment. He had only to gather up the necklace from the table when it came to his turn to retire, and he knew he could count on at least five minutes by himself while we were all arguing about the choice of a word. He had only to snip the pearls from the string with his pocket-scissors, burn the string in the grate and fasten the pearls to the mistletoe with the fine pins. The mistletoe was hung on the chandelier, pretty high—it's a lofty room—but he could easily reach it by standing on the glass table, which wouldn't show footmarks, and it was almost certain that nobody would think of examining the mistletoe for extra berries. I shouldn't have thought of it myself if I hadn't found that pin which he had dropped. That gave me the idea that the pearls had been separated and the rest was easy. I took the pearls off the mistletoe last night—the clasp was there, too, pinned among the holly leaves. Here they are. Comphrey must have got a nasty shock this morning. I knew he was our man when he suggested that the guests should tackle the decorations themselves and that he should do the back drawing-room—but I wish I had seen his face when he came to the mistletoe and found the pearls gone."

"And you worked it all out when you found the pin?" said Sir Septimus.

"Yes, I knew then where the pearls had gone to."

"But you never even looked at the mistletoe."

"I saw it reflected in the black glass floor, and it struck me then how much the mistletoe berries looked like pearls."

Hercule Poirot

THE JEWEL ROBBERY AT THE GRAND METROPOLITAN

By
AGATHA CHRISTIE

POIROT," I said, "a change of air would do you good"
"You think so, *mon ami*?"
"I am sure of it"

"Eh—ch?" said my friend, smiling "It is all arranged, then?"
"You will come?"

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"Brighton As a matter of fact, a friend of mine in the City put me on to a very good thing, and—well, I have money to burn, as the saying goes I think a week-end at the Grand Metropolitan would do us all the good in the world"

"Thank you, I accept most gratefully You have the good heart to think of an old man And the good heart, it is in the end worth all the little grey cells Yes, yes, I who speak to you am in danger of forgetting that sometimes"

I did not quite relish the implication I fancy that Poirot is sometimes a little inclined to under-estimate my mental capacities But his pleasure was so evident that I put my slight annoyance aside

"Then, that's all right," I said hastily

Saturday evening saw us dining at the Grand Metropolitan in the midst of the gay throng All the world and his wife seemed to be at Brighton The dresses were marvellous, and the jewels—worn sometimes with more love of display than good taste—were something magnificent

"*Hein*, it is a sight this!" murmured Poirot "This is the home of the Profiteer, is it not so, Hastings?"

"Supposed to be," I replied "But we'll hope they aren't all tarred with the Profiteering brush"

Poirot gazed round him placidly

"The sight of so many jewels makes me wish I had turned my brains to crime, instead of to its detection What a magnificent opportunity for some thief of distinction! Regard, Hastings, that stout woman by the pillar She is, as you would say, plastered with gems"

I followed his eyes

"Why," I exclaimed, "it's Mrs Opalsen "

"You know her?"

"Slightly Her husband is a rich stockbroker who made a fortune in the recent Oil boom "

After dinner we ran across the Opalsens in the lounge, and I introduced Poirot to them We chatted for a few minutes, and ended by having our coffee together

Poirot said a few words in praise of some of the costlier gems displayed on the lady's ample bosom, and she brightened up at once

"It's a perfect hobby of mine, Mr Poirot I just *love* jewellery Ed knows my weakness, and every time things go well he brings me something new You are interested in precious stones?"

"I have had a good deal to do with them one time and another, madame My profession has brought me into contact with some of the most famous jewels in the world "

He went on to narrate, with discreet pseudonyms, the story of the historic jewels of a reigning house, and Mrs Opalsen listened with bated breath

"There now!" she exclaimed, as he ended "If it isn't just like a play! You know, I've got some pearls of my own that have a history attached to them I believe it's supposed to be one of the finest necklaces in the world—the pearls are so beautifully matched and so perfect in colour I declare I really must run up and get it!"

"Oh, madame," protested Poirot, "you are too amiable Pray do not derange yourself!"

"Oh, but I'd like to show it to you "

The buxom dame waddled across to the lift briskly enough Her husband, who had been talking to me, looked at Poirot inquiringly

"Madame your wife is so amiable as to insist on showing me her pearl necklace," explained the latter

"Oh, the pearls!" Opalsen smiled in a satisfied fashion "Well, they *are* worth seeing Cost a pretty penny too! Still, the money's there all right, I could get what I paid for them any day—perhaps more May have to, too, if things go on as they are now Money's confoundedly tight in the City All this infernal E P D " He rambled on, launching into technicalities where I could not follow him

He was interrupted by a small page-boy who approached and murmured something in his ear

"Eh—what? I'll come at once Not taken ill, is she? Excuse me, gentlemen "

He left us abruptly Poirot leaned back and lit one of his tiny Russian cigarettes Then, carefully and meticulously, he arranged

the empty coffee-cups in a neat row, and beamed happily on the result

The minutes passed The Opalsens did not return

"Curious," I remarked, at length "I wonder when they will come back "

Poirot watched the ascending spirals of smoke, and then said thoughtfully

"They will not come back "

"Why?"

"Because, my friend, something has happened "

"What sort of thing? How do you know?" I asked curiously

Poirot smiled

"A few moments ago the manager came hurriedly out of his office and ran upstairs He was much agitated The lift-boy is deep in talk with one of the pages The lift-bell has rung three times, but he heeds it not Thirdly, even the waiters are *distract*, and to make a waiter *distract*—" Poirot shook his head with an air of finality "The affair must indeed be of the first magnitude Ah, it is as I thought! Here come the police "

Two men had just entered the hotel—one in uniform, the other in plain clothes They spoke to a page, and were immediately ushered upstairs A few minutes later, the same boy descended and came up to where we were sitting

"Mr Opalsen's compliments, and would you step upstairs "

Poirot sprang nimbly to his feet One would have said that he awaited the summons I followed with no less alacrity

The Opalsen's apartments were situated on the first floor After knocking on the door, the page-boy retired, and we answered the summons, "Come in!" A strange scene met our eyes The room was Mrs Opalsen's bedroom, and in the centre of it, lying back in an arm-chair, was the lady herself, weeping violently She presented an extraordinary spectacle, with the tears making great furrows in the powder with which her complexion was liberally coated Mr Opalsen was striding up and down angrily The two police officials stood in the middle of the room, one with a note-book in hand A hotel chambermaid, looking frightened to death, stood by the fireplace, and on the other side of the room a Frenchwoman, obviously Mrs Opalsen's maid, was weeping and wringing her hands, with an intensity of grief that rivalled that of her mistress

Into this pandemonium stepped Poirot, neat and smiling Immediately, with an energy surprising in one of her bulk, Mrs Opalsen sprang from her chair towards him

"There now, Ed may say what he likes, but I believe in luck, I do It was fated I should meet you the way I did this evening,

and I've a feeling that if you can't get my pearls back for me nobody can "

"Calm yourself, I pray of you, madame " Poirot patted her hand soothingly "Reassure yourself All will be well Hercule Poirot will aid you!"

Mr Opalsen turned to the police inspector

"There will be no objection to my—er—calling in this gentleman, I suppose?"

"None at all, sir," replied the man civilly, but with complete indifference "Perhaps now your lady's feeling better she'll just let us have the facts?"

Mrs Opalsen looked helplessly at Poirot He led her back to her chair

"Seat yourself, madame, and recount to us the whole history without agitating yourself "

Thus adjured, Mrs Opalsen dried her eyes gingerly, and began

"I came upstairs after dinner to fetch my pearls for Mr Poirot here to see The chambermaid and Célestine were both in the room as usual——"

"Excuse me, madame, but what do you mean by 'as usual'?"

Mr Opalsen explained

"I make it a rule that no one is to come into this room unless Célestine, the maid, is there also The chambermaid does the room in the morning while Célestine is present, and comes in after dinner to turn down the beds under the same conditions, otherwise she never enters the room "

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mrs Opalsen, "I came up I went to the drawer here,"—she indicated the bottom right-hand drawer of the knee-hole dressing-table—"took out my jewel-case and unlocked it It seemed quite as usual—but the pearls were not there!"

The inspector had been busy with his note-book "When had you last seen them?" he asked

"They were there when I went down to dinner "

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure I was uncertain whether to wear them or not, but in the end I decided on the emeralds, and put them back in the jewel-case "

"Who locked up the jewel-case?"

"I did I wear the key on a chain round my neck " She held it up as she spoke

The inspector examined it, and shrugged his shoulders

"The thief must have had a duplicate key No difficult matter The lock is quite a simple one What did you do after you'd locked the jewel-case?"

"I put it back in the bottom drawer where I always keep it "

"You didn't lock the drawer?"

"No, I never do. My maid remains in the room till I come up, so there's no need."

The inspector's face grew graver.

"Am I to understand that the jewels were there when you went down to dinner, and that since then *the maid has not left the room?*"

Suddenly, as though the horror of her own situation for the first time burst upon her, Célestine uttered a piercing shriek, and, flinging herself upon Poirot, poured out a torrent of incoherent French.

The suggestion was infamous! That she should be suspected of robbing Madame! The police were well known to be of a stupidity incredible! But Monsieur, who was a Frenchman—

"A Belgian," interjected Poirot, but Célestine paid no attention to the correction.

Monsieur would not stand by and see her falsely accused, while that infamous chambermaid was allowed to go scot-free. She had never liked her—a bold, red-faced thing—a born thief. She had said from the first that she was not honest. And had kept a sharp watch over her too, when she was doing Madame's room! Let those idiots of policemen search her, and if they did not find Madame's pearls on her it would be very surprising!

Although this harangue was uttered in rapid and virulent French, Célestine had interlarded it with a wealth of gesture, and the chambermaid realised at least a part of her meaning. She reddened angrily.

"If that foreign woman's saying I took the pearls, it's a lie!" she declared heatedly. "I never so much as saw them."

"Search her!" screamed the other. "You will find it is as I say."

"You're a liar—do you hear?" said the chambermaid, advancing upon her. "Stole 'em yourself, and want to put it on me. Why, I was only in the room about three minutes before the lady come up, and then you were sitting here the whole time, as you always do, like a cat watching a mouse."

The inspector looked across inquiringly at Célestine. "Is that true? Didn't you leave the room at all?"

"I did not actually leave her alone," admitted Célestine reluctantly, "but I went into my own room through the door here twice—once to fetch a reel of cotton, and once for my scissors. She must have done it then."

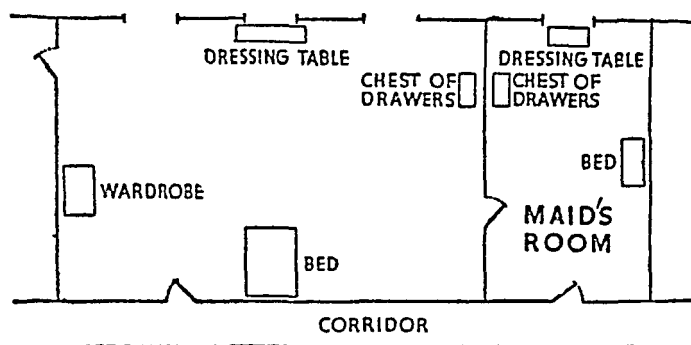
"You wasn't gone a minute," retorted the chambermaid angrily. "Just popped out and in again. I'd be glad if the police *would* search me. *I've* nothing to be afraid of."

At this moment there was a tap at the door. The inspector went to it. His face brightened when he saw who it was.

"Ah!" he said "That's rather fortunate I sent for one of our female searchers, and she's just arrived Perhaps if you wouldn't mind going into the room next door"

He looked at the chambermaid, who stepped across the threshold with a toss of her head, the searcher following her closely

The French girl had sunk sobbing into a chair Poirot was looking round the room, the main features of which I have made clear by a sketch



"Where does that door lead?" he inquired, nodding his head towards the one by the window

"Into the next apartment, I believe," said the inspector "It's bolted, anyway, on this side"

Poirot walked across to it, tried it, then drew back the bolt and tried it again

"And on the other side as well," he remarked "Well, that seems to rule out that"

He walked over to the windows, examining each of them in turn

"And again—nothing. Not even a balcony outside"

"Even if there were," said the inspector impatiently, "I don't see how that would help us, if the maid never left the room"

"*Evidemment*," said Poirot, not disconcerted "As mademoiselle is positive she did not leave the room—"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of the chambermaid and the police searcher

"Nothing," said the latter laconically

"I should hope not, indeed," said the chambermaid virtuously "And that French hussy ought to be ashamed of herself taking away an honest girl's character!"

"There, there, my girl, that's all right," said the inspector, opening the door "Nobody suspects you. You go along and get on with your work"

The chambermaid went unwillingly

"Going to search *her*?" she demanded, pointing at Célestine

"Yes, yes!" He shut the door on her and turned the key

Célestine accompanied the searcher into the small room in her turn. A few minutes later she also returned. Nothing had been found on her.

The inspector's face grew graver.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me all the same, miss." He turned to Mrs. Opalsen. "I'm sorry, madam, but all the evidence points that way. If she's not got them on her, they're hidden somewhere about the room."

Célestine uttered a piercing shriek, and clung to Poirot's arm. The latter bent and whispered something in the girl's ear. She looked up at him doubtfully.

"*Si, si, mon enfant*—I assure you it is better not to resist." Then he turned to the inspector. "You permit, monsieur? A little experiment—purely for my own satisfaction."

"Depends on what it is," replied the police officer non-committally.

Poirot addressed Célestine once more.

"You have told us that you went into your room to fetch a reel of cotton. Whereabouts was it?"

"On the top of the chest of drawers, monsieur."

"And the scissors?"

"They also."

"Would it be troubling you too much, mademoiselle, to ask you to repeat those two actions? You were sitting here with your work, you say?"

Célestine sat down, and then, at a sign from Poirot, rose, passed into the adjoining room, took up an object from the chest of drawers, and returned.

Poirot divided his attention between her movements and a large turnip of a watch which he held in the palm of his hand.

"Again, if you please, mademoiselle."

At the conclusion of the second performance, he made a note in his pocket-book, and returned the watch to his pocket.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. And you, monsieur,"—he bowed to the inspector—"for your courtesy."

The inspector seemed somewhat entertained by this excessive politeness. Célestine departed in a flood of tears, accompanied by the woman and the plain-clothes official.

Then, with a brief apology to Mrs. Opalsen, the inspector set to work to ransack the room. He pulled out drawers, opened cupboards, completely unmade the bed, and tapped the floor. Mr. Opalsen looked on sceptically.

"You really think you will find them?"

"Yes, sir. It stands to reason. She hadn't time to take them out

of the room. The lady's discovering the robbery so soon upset her plans. No, they're here right enough. One of the two must have hidden them—and it's very unlikely for the chambermaid to have done so."

"More than unlikely—impossible!" said Poirot quietly.

"Eh?" The inspector stared.

Poirot smiled modestly.

"I will demonstrate. Hastings, my good friend, take my watch in your hand—with care. It is a family heirloom! Just now I timed Mademoiselle's movements—her first absence from the room was of twelve seconds, her second of fifteen. Now observe my actions. Madame will have the kindness to give me the key of the jewel-case. I thank you. My friend Hastings will have the kindness to say 'Go!'"

"Go!" I said.

With almost incredible swiftness, Poirot wrenched open the drawer of the dressing-table, extracted the jewel-case, fitted the key in the lock, opened the case, selected a piece of jewellery, shut and locked the case, and returned it to the drawer, which he pushed to again. His movements were like lightning.

"Well, *mon ami*?" he demanded of me breathlessly.

"Forty-six seconds," I replied.

"You see?" He looked round. "There would not have been time for the chambermaid even to take the necklace out, far less hide it."

"Then that settles it on the maid," said the inspector with satisfaction, and returned to his search. He passed into the maid's bedroom next door.

Poirot was frowning thoughtfully. Suddenly he shot a question at Mr. Opalsen.

"This necklace—it was, without doubt, insured?"

Mr. Opalsen looked a trifle surprised at the question.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly, "that is so."

"But what does that matter?" broke in Mrs. Opalsen tearfully. "It's my necklace I want. It was unique. No money could be the same."

"I comprehend, madame," said Poirot soothingly. "I comprehend perfectly. To *la femme* sentiment is everything—is it not so? But monsieur, who has not the so fine susceptibility, will doubtless find some slight consolation in the fact."

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Opalsen rather uncertainly. "Still——"

He was interrupted by a shout of triumph from the inspector. He came in dangling something from his fingers.

With a cry, Mrs. Opalsen heaved herself up from her chair. She was a changed woman.

"Oh, oh, my necklace!"

She clasped it to her breast with both hands We crowded round

"Where was it?" demanded Opalsen

"Maid's bed In among the springs of the wire mattress She must have stolen it and hidden it there before the chambermaid arrived on the scene"

"You permit, madame?" said Poirot gently He took the necklace from her and examined it closely, then handed it back with a bow

"I'm afraid, madame, you'll have to hand it over to us for the time being" said the inspector "We shall want it for the charge But it shall be returned to you as soon as possible"

Mr Opalsen frowned

"Is that necessary?"

"I'm afraid so, sir Just a formality"

"Oh, let him take it, Ed!" cried his wife "I'd feel safer if he did I shouldn't sleep a wink thinking some one else might try and get hold of it That wretched girl! And I would never have believed it of her"

"There, there, my dear, don't take on so"

I felt a gentle pressure on my arm It was Poirot

"Shall we slip away, my friend? I think our services are no longer needed"

Once outside, however, he hesitated, and then, much to my surprise, he remarked

"I should rather like to see the room next door"

The door was not locked, and we entered The room, which was a large double one, was unoccupied Dust lay about rather noticeably, and my sensitive friend gave a characteristic grimace as he ran his finger round a rectangular mark on a table near the window

"The *service* leaves to be desired," he observed dryly

He was staring thoughtfully out of the window, and seemed to have fallen into a brown study

"Well?" I demanded impatiently "What did we come in here for?"

He started

"*Je vous demande pardon, mon ami* I wished to see if the door was really bolted on this side also"

"Well," I said, glancing at the door which communicated with the room we had just left, "it *is* bolted"

Poirot nodded He still seemed to be thinking

"And, anyway," I continued, "what does it matter? The case is over I wish you'd had more chance of distinguishing yourself

But it was the kind of case that even a stiff-backed idiot like that inspector couldn't go wrong over "

Poirot shook his head

"The case is not over, my friend It will not be over until we find out who stole the pearls "

"But the maid did!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Why," I stammered, "they were found—actually in her mattress "

"Ta, ta, ta!" said Poirot impatiently "Those were not the pearls "

"What?"

"Imitation, *mon ami* "

The statement took my breath away Poirot was smiling placidly

"The good inspector obviously knows nothing of jewels But presently there will be a fine hullabaloo!"

"Come!" I cried, dragging at his arm

"Where?"

"We must tell the Opalsens at once "

"I think not "

"But that poor woman——"

"*Eh bien*, that poor woman, as you call her, will have a much better night believing the jewels to be safe "

"But the thief may escape with them!"

"As usual, my friend, you speak without reflection How do you know that the pearls Mrs Opalsen locked up so carefully to-night were not the false ones, and that the real robbery did not take place at a much earlier date?"

"Oh!" I said, bewildered

"Exactly," said Poirot, beaming "We start again "

He led the way out of the room, paused a moment as though considering, and then walked down to the end of the corridor, stopping outside the small den where the chambermaids and valets of the respective floors congregated Our particular chambermaid appeared to be holding a small court there, and to be retailing her late experiences to an appreciative audience She stopped in the middle of a sentence Poirot bowed with his usual politeness

"Excuse that I derange you, but I shall be obliged if you will unlock for me the door of Mr Opalsen's room "

The woman rose willingly, and we accompanied her down the passage again Mr Opalsen's room was on the other side of the corridor, its door facing that of his wife's room The chambermaid unlocked it with her pass-key, and we entered

As she was about to depart Poirot detained her

"One moment, have you ever seen among the effects of Mr Opalsen a card like this?"

He held out a plain white card, rather highly glazed and uncommon in appearance. The maid took it and scrutinised it carefully.

"No, sir, I can't say I have. But, anyway, the valet has most to do with the gentlemen's rooms."

"I see. Thank you."

Poirot took back the card. The woman departed. Poirot appeared to reflect a little. Then he gave a short, sharp nod of the head.

"Ring the bell, I pray of you, Hastings. Three times, for the valet."

I obeyed, devoured with curiosity. Meanwhile Poirot had emptied the waste-paper-basket on the floor, and was swiftly going through its contents.

In a few moments the valet answered the bell. To him Poirot put the same question, and handed him the card to examine. But the response was the same. The valet had never seen a card of that particular quality among Mr Opalsen's belongings. Poirot thanked him, and he withdrew, somewhat unwillingly, with an inquisitive glance at the overturned waste-paper-basket and the litter on the floor. He could hardly have helped overhearing Poirot's thoughtful remark as he bundled the torn papers back again.

"And the necklace was heavily insured."

"Poirot," I cried, "I see——"

"You see nothing, my friend," he replied quickly. "As usual, nothing at all! It is incredible—but there it is. Let us return to our own apartments."

We did so in silence. Once there, to my intense surprise, Poirot effected a rapid change of clothing.

"I go to London to-night," he explained. "It is imperative."

"What?"

"Absolutely. The real work, that of the brain (ah, those brave little grey cells), it is done. I go to seek the confirmation. I shall find it! Impossible to deceive Hercule Poirot!"

"You'll come a cropper one of these days," I observed, rather disgusted by his vanity.

"Do not be enraged, I beg of you, *mon ami*. I count on you to do me a service—of your friendship."

"Of course," I said eagerly, rather ashamed of my moroseness. "What is it?"

"The sleeve of my coat that I have taken off—will you brush it? See you, a little white powder has clung to it. You without doubt observed me run my finger round the drawer of the dressing-table?"

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"No, I didn't "

"You should observe my actions, my friend Thus I obtained the powder on my finger, and, being a little over-excited, I rubbed it on my sleeve, an action without method which I deplore—false to all my principles "

"But what was the powder?" I asked, not particularly interested in Poirot's principles

"Not the poison of the Borgias," replied Poirot, with a twinkle "I see your imagination mounting I should say it was French chalk "

"French chalk?"

"Yes, cabinet-makers use it to make drawers run smoothly "

I laughed

"You old sinner! I thought you were working up to something exciting "

"Au revoir, my friend I save myself I fly!"

The door shut behind him With a smile, half of derision, half of affection, I picked up the coat, and stretched out my hand for the clothes brush

The next morning, hearing nothing from Poirot, I went out for a stroll, met some old friends, and lunched with them at their hotel In the afternoon we went for a spin A punctured tyre delayed us, and it was past eight when I got back to the Grand Metropolitan

The first sight that met my eyes was Poirot, looking even more diminutive than usual, sandwiched between the Opalsens, beaming in a state of placid satisfaction

"*Mon ami* Hastings!" he cried, and sprang to meet me "Embrace me, my friend, all has marched to a marvel!"

Luckily, the embrace was merely figurative—not a thing one is always sure of with Poirot

"Do you mean——" I began

"Just wonderful, I call it!" said Mrs Opalsen, smiling all over her fat face "Didn't I tell you, Ed, that if he couldn't get back my pearls nobody would?"

"You did, my dear, you did And you were right "

I looked helplessly at Poirot, and he answered the glance

"My friend Hastings is, as you say in England, all at the seaside Seat yourself, and I will recount to you all the affair that has so happily ended."

"Ended?"

"But yes They are arrested "

"Who are arrested?"

"The chambermaid and the valet, *parbleu!* You did not suspect? Not with my parting hint about the French chalk?"

"You said cabinet-makers used it"

"Certainly they do—to make drawers slide easily. Somebody wanted that drawer to slide in and out without any noise. Who could that be? Obviously, only the chambermaid. The plan was so ingenious that it did not at once leap to the eye—not even to the eye of Hercule Poirot.

"Listen, this was how it was done. The valet was in the empty room next door, waiting. The French maid leaves the room. Quick as a flash the chambermaid whips open the drawer, takes out the jewel-case, and, slipping back the bolt, passes it through the door. The valet opens it at his leisure with the duplicate key with which he has provided himself, extracts the necklace, and waits his time. Célestine leaves the room again, and—pst!—in a flash the case is passed back again and replaced in the drawer.

"Madame arrives, the theft is discovered. The chambermaid demands to be searched, with a good deal of righteous indignation, and leaves the room without a stain on her character. The imitation necklace with which they have provided themselves has been concealed in the French girl's bed that morning by the chambermaid—a master stroke, *ça!*"

"But what did you go to London for?"

"You remember the card?"

"Certainly. It puzzled me—and puzzles me still. I thought——"

I hesitated delicately, glancing at Mr. Opalsen.

Poirot laughed heartily.

"*Une blague!* For the benefit of the valet. The card was one with a specially prepared surface—for finger-prints. I went straight to Scotland Yard, asked for our old friend Inspector Japp, and laid the facts before him. As I had suspected, the finger-prints proved to be those of two well-known jewel thieves who have been 'wanted' for some time. Japp came down with me, the thieves were arrested, and the necklace was discovered in the valet's possession. A clever pair, but they failed in *method*. Have I not told you, Hastings, at least thirty-six times, that without method——"

"At least thirty-six thousand times!" I interrupted. "But where did their 'method' break down?"

"*Mon ami*, it is a good plan to take a place as chambermaid or valet—but you must not shirk your work. They left an empty room undusted, and therefore, when the man put down the jewel-case on the little table near the communicating door, it left a square mark——"

"I remember," I cried.

"Before, I was undecided. Then—I *knew!*"

There was a moment's silence.

"And I've got my pearls," said Mrs Opalsen as a sort of Greek chorus

"Well," I said, "I'd better have some dinner "

Poirot accompanied me

"This ought to mean kudos for you," I observed

"*Pas du tout*," replied Poirot tranquilly "Japp and the local inspector will divide the credit between them But"—he tapped his pocket—"I have a cheque here, from Mr Opalsen, and, how say you, my friend? This week-end has not gone according to plan Shall we return here next week-end—at my expense this time?"

Mr. Fortune

THE SNOWBALL BURGLARY

By

H C BAILEY

A TELEGRAM was brought to Mr Fortune. It announced that the woman whom his ingenuity convicted of the Winstanton murder had confessed it in prison just after the Home Secretary decided not to hang her. Mr Fortune sighed satisfaction and took his hostess in to dinner.

He was staying in a Devonshire country house for mental repairs. This is not much like him, for save on visits of duty country houses seldom receive him. The conversation of the country, he complains, is too great a strain upon his intellect. Also, he has no interest in killing creatures, except professionally. But the output of crime had been large that winter and the task of keeping Scotland Yard straight, laborious; and he sought relief with Colonel Beach at Cranston Regis. For Tom Beach, once in the first flight of hunting men, having married a young wife, put central heat and electric light into a remote Tudor manor house, and retired there to grow iris and poultry. Neither poultry nor young wives allured Reggie Fortune, but gardens he loves, and his own iris were not satisfying him.

So he sat by Alice Beach at her table, and while her talk flowed on like the brook in the poem, while he wondered why men marry, since their bachelor dinners are better eating, surveyed with mild eyes her and her guests. Tom Beach had probably been unable to help marrying her, she was so pink and white and round, her eyes so shy and innocent. She was one of those women who make it instantly clear to men that they exist to be married, and Tom Beach has always done his duty. "But she's not such a fool as she looks," Reggie had pronounced.

With pity if not sympathy he glanced down the table at Tom Beach, that large, red, honest man who sat doing his best between dignity and impudence, dignity in the awful person of Mrs Faulks and the mighty pretty impudence of his wife's sister, Sally Winslow. Mrs Faulks has been described as one who could never be caught bending, or a model of the art of the corset. She is spare, she is straight, and few have seen her exhibit interest in anything but

other people's incomes, which she always distrusts. A correct woman, but for a habit of wearing too many jewels.

What she was doing in Tom Beach's genial house was plain enough. Her son had brought her to inspect Sally Winslow, as a man brings a vet to the horse he fancies. But it was not plain why Alexander Faulks fancied Sally Winslow. Imagine a bulldog after a butterfly. But bulldogs have a sense of humour. Sally Winslow is a wisp of a creature who has no respect for any one, even herself. Under her bright bobbed hair, indeed, is the daintiest colour, but when some fellow said she had the face of a fairy, a woman suggested the face of a fairy's maid. She listened to Alexander's heavy talk and watched him in a fearful fascination, but sometimes she shot a glance across the table where a little man with a curly head and a roguish eye was eating his dinner demurely. His worst enemies never said that Captain Bunny Cosdon's manners were bad.

Now you know them all. When they made up a four for bridge, upon which Mrs. Faulks always insists, it was inevitable that Reggie Fortune should stand out, for his simple mind declines to grasp the principles of cards. Alexander Faulks in his masterful way directed Sally to the table, and scared, but submissive, she sat down and giggled nervously. Reggie found himself left to his hostess and Captain Cosdon. They seemed determined to entertain him and he sighed and listened.

So he says. He is emphatic that he did not go to sleep. But the study of the events of that evening which afterwards became necessary, makes it clear that a long time passed before Alice Beach was saying the first thing that he remembers. "Did you ever know a perfect crime, Mr. Fortune?"

Mr. Fortune then sat up, as he records, and took notice.

Captain Cosdon burst out laughing, and departed, humming a stave of "Meet me to-night in Dreamland."

Mr. Fortune gazed at his hostess. He had not supposed that she could say anything so sensible. "Most crimes are perfect," he said.

"But how horrible! I should hate to be murdered and know there wasn't a clue who did it."

"Oh, there'll be a clue all right," Reggie assured her.

"Are you sure? And will you promise to catch my murderer, Mr. Fortune?"

"Well, you know," he considered her round amiable face, "if you were murdered it would be a case of art for art's sake. That's very rare. I was speakin' scientifically. A perfect crime is a complete series of cause and effect. Where you have that, there's always a clue, there is always evidence, and when you get to work on it the unknown quantities come out. Yes. Most crimes are perfect."

But you must allow for chance Sometimes the criminal is an idiot That's a nuisance Sometimes he has a streak of luck and the crime is damaged before we find it, something has been washed out, a bit of it has been lost It's the imperfect crimes that give trouble "

"But how fascinating!"

"Oh, Lord, no," said Mr Fortune

The bridge-players were getting up Sally Winslow was announcing that she had lost all but honour Mrs Faulks wore a ruthless smile Sally went off to bed

"Oh, Mrs Faulks," her sister cried, "do come Mr Fortune is lecturing on crime "

"Really How very interesting," said Mrs Faulks, and transfixed Reggie with an icy stare

"The perfect criminal in one lesson," Alice Beach laughed "I feel a frightful character already All you want is luck, you know Or else Mr Fortune catches you every time "

"I say, you know, Alice," her husband protested

A scream rang out Alice stopped laughing The little company looked at each other "Where was that?" Tom Beach muttered

"Not in the house, Colonel," Faulks said "Certainly not in the house "

Tom Beach was making for the window when all the lights went out

Alice gave a cry The shrill voice of Mrs Faulks arose to say, "Really!" Colonel Beach could be heard swearing "Don't let us get excited," said Faulks Reggie Fortune struck a match

"Excited be damned," said Tom Beach, and rang the bell

Reggie Fortune, holding his match aloft, made for the door and opened it The hall was dark, too

"Oh, Lord, it's the main fuse blown out!" Tom Beach groaned

"Or something has happened in your little power station," said Reggie Fortune cheerfully, and his host snorted For the electricity at Cranston Regis comes from turbines on the stream which used to fill the Tudor fish-ponds, and Colonel Beach loves his machinery like a mother

He shouted to the butler to bring candles, and out of the dark the voice of the butler was heard apologising He roared to the chauffeur, who was his engineer, to put in a new fuse "It's not the fuse, Colonel," came a startled voice, "there's no juice "

Colonel Beach swore the more "Run down to the power-house, confound you Where the devil are those candles?"

The butler was very sorry, sir, the butler was coming, sir

"Really!" said Mrs Faulks in the dark, for Reggie had grown tired of striking matches "Most inconvenient" So in the dark they waited . . .

And again they heard a scream. It was certainly in the house this time, it came from upstairs, it was in the voice of Sally Winslow. Reggie Fortune felt some one bump against him, and knew by the weight it was Faulks. Reggie struck another match, and saw him vanish into the darkness above as he called, "Miss Winslow, Miss Winslow!"

There was the sound of a scuffle and a thud. Colonel Beach stormed upstairs. A placid voice spoke out of the dark at Reggie's ear, "I say, what's up with the jolly old house?" The butler arrived quivering with a candle in each hand and a bodyguard of candle-bearing satellites, and showed him the smiling face of Captain Cosdon.

From above Colonel Beach roared for lights. "The C O sounds peeved," said Captain Cosdon. "Some one's for it, what?"

They took the butler's candles and ran up, discovering with the light Mr. Faulks holding his face together. "Hallo, hallo! Dirty work at the cross-roads, what? Why— Sally! Good God!"

On the floor of the passage Sally Winslow lay like a child asleep, one frail bare arm flung up above her head.

"Look at that, Fortune," Tom Beach cried. "Damned scoundrels!"

"Hold the candle," said Reggie Fortune, but as he knelt beside her the electric light came on again.

"Great Jimmy!" Captain Cosdon exclaimed. "Who did that?"

"Don't play the fool, Bunny," Tom Beach growled. "What have they done to her, Fortune?"

Reggie's plump, capable hands were moving upon the girl delicately. "Knocked her out," he said, and stared down at her, and rubbed his chin.

"Who? What? How?" Cosdon cried. "Hallo, Faulks, what's your trouble? Who hit you?"

"How on earth should I know," Faulks mumbled, still feeling his face as he peered at the girl. "When Miss Winslow screamed, I ran up. It was dark, of course. Some men caught hold of me. I struck out and they set on me. I was knocked down. I wish you would look at my eye, Fortune."

Reggie was looking at Sally, whose face had begun to twitch. "Your eye will be a merry colour to-morrow," Cosdon assured him. "But who hit Sally?"

"It was the fellows who set upon me, I suppose, of course, they were attacking her when I rescued her."

"Stout fellow," said Cosdon. "How many were there?"

"Quite a number. Quite. How can I possibly tell? It was dark. Quite a number."

Sally tried to sneeze and failed, opened her eyes and murmured,

"The light, the light" She saw the men about her and began to laugh hysterically

"Good God, the scoundrels may be in the house still," cried Tom Beach "Come on, Cosdon"

"I should say so," said Captain Cosdon, but he lingered over Sally "All right now?" he asked anxiously

"Oh, Bunny," she choked in her laughter "Yes, yes, I'm all right Oh, Mr Fortune, what is it? Oh, poor Mr Faulks, what has happened?"

"Just so," said Reggie He picked her up and walked off with her to her bedroom

"Oh, you are strong," she said, not coquetting, but in honest surprise, like a child

Reggie laughed "There's nothing of you," and he laid her down on her bed "Well, what about it?"

"I feel all muzzy"

"That'll pass off," said Reggie cheerfully "Do you know what hit you?"

"No Isn't it horrid? It was all dark, you know There's no end of a bruise," she felt behind her ear and made a face

"I know, I know," Reggie murmured sympathetically "And how did it all begin?"

"Why, I came up to bed, Mr Fortune—heavens, there may be a man in here now!" she raised herself

"Yes, we'd better clear that up," said Reggie, and looked under the bed and opened the wardrobe and thrust into her dresses and turned back to her "No luck, Miss Winslow"

"Oh, thank goodness," she sank down again "You see, I came up and put the light on, of course, and there was a man at the window there Then I screamed"

"The first scream," Reggie murmured

"And then the lights went out I ran away and tumbled over that chair and then out into the passage I kept bumping into things and it was horrid And then—oh, somebody caught hold of me and I screamed——"

"The second scream," Reggie murmured

"I was sort of flung about There were men there fighting in the dark Horrid Hitting all round me, you know And then—oh, well, I suppose I stopped one, didn't I?"

There was a tap at the door "May I come in, doctor?" said Alice Beach

"Oh, Alice, have they caught any one?"

"Not a creature Isn't it awful? Oh, Sally, you poor darling," her sister embraced her "What a shame! Is it bad?"

"I'm all muddled And jolly sore"

"My dear! It is too bad it should be you Oh, Mr Fortune, what did happen?"

"Some fellow knocked her out She'll be all right in the morning But keep her quiet and get her off to sleep " He went to the window It was open and the curtains blowing in the wind He looked out A ladder stood against the wall "And that's that Yes Put her to bed, Mrs Beach "

Outside in the passage he found Captain Cosdon waiting "I say, Fortune, is she much hurt?"

"She's taken a good hard knock She's not made for it But she'll be all right "

"Sally! Oh damn," said Cosdon

"Did you catch anybody?"

"Napoo All clear The Colonel's going round to see if they got away with anything And Faulks wants you to look at his poor eye "

"Nothing of yours gone?"

Cosdon laughed "No But I'm not exactly the burglar's friend, don't you know? My family jewels wouldn't please the haughty crook I say, it's a queer stunt Ever been in one like it?"

"I don't think it went according to plan," said Reggie Fortune

He came down and found Faulks with an eye dwindling behind a bruise of many colours, arguing with an agitated butler that the house must contain arnica Before he could give the attention which Mr Faulks imperiously demanded, the parade voice of the Colonel rang through the house "Fortune, come up here!"

Tom Beach stood in the study where he writes the biographies of his poultry and his iris There also are kept the cups, medals and other silver with which shows reward their beauty "Look at that!" he cried, with a tragic gesture The black pedestals of the cups, the velvet cases of the medals stood empty

"Great Jimmy!" said Captain Cosdon in awe

"Well, that's very thorough," said Reggie "And the next thing, please "

Colonel Beach said it was a damned outrage He also supposed that the fellows had stripped the whole place And he bounced out.

Reggie went to his own room He had nothing which could be stolen but his brushes, and they were not gone He looked out of the window In the cold March moonlight he saw two men moving hither and thither, and recognised one for his chauffeur and factotum Sam, and shouted

"Nothing doing, sir," Sam called back "Clean getaway "

Reggie went downstairs to the smoking-room He was stretched in a chair consuming soda-water and a large cigar when there broke upon him in a wave of chattering Tom Beach and Alice and Captain Cosdon.

"Oh, Mr Fortune, is this a perfect crime?" Alice laughed
Reggie shook his head "I'm afraid it had an accident in its youth The crime that took the wrong turning"

"How do you mean, Fortune?" Tom Beach frowned "It's deuced awkward"

"Awkward, is the word," Reggie agreed "What's gone Colonel?"

"Well, there's my pots, you know And Alice has lost a set of cameos she had in her dressing-room"

"Pigs!" said Alice with conviction

"And Mrs Faulks says they've taken that big ruby brooch she was wearing before dinner You know it"

"It's one of the things I could bear not to know," Reggie murmured "Nothing else?"

"She says she doesn't know, she's too upset to be sure I say, Fortune, this is a jolly business for me"

"My dear chap!"

"She's gone to bed fuming Faulks is in a sweet state too"

"What's he lost?"

"Only his eye," Cosdon chuckled

"That's the lot, then? Nice little bag, but rather on the small side Yes, it didn't go according to plan"

"Oh, Mr Fortune, what are you going to do?"

"Do?" said Reggie reproachfully "I? Where's the nearest policeman?"

"Why, here," Alice pointed at him

"Cranston Abbas," said Tom Beach, "and he's only a yokel Village constable, don't you know"

"Yes, you are rather remote, Colonel What is there about you that brings the wily cracksman down here?"

"Mrs Faulks!" Alice cried "That woman must travel with a jeweller's shop There's a chance for you, Mr Fortune Get her rubies back and you'll win her heart"

"Jewelled in fifteen holes I'd be afraid of burglars Mrs Beach, you're frivolous, and the Colonel's going to burst into tears Will any one tell me what did happen? We were all in the drawing-room—no Where were you, Cosdon?"

"Writing letters here, old thing"

"Quite so And the servants?"

"All in the servants' hall at supper!" Colonel Beach said "They are all right"

"Quite Miss Winslow went upstairs and saw a man at her window There's a ladder at it She screamed and the lights went out Why?"

"The rascals got at the power-house Baker found the main switch off"

"Then they knew their way about here. Have you sacked any servant lately? Had any strange workman in the place? No? Yet the intelligence work was very sound. Well, in the darkness Miss Winslow tumbled out into the passage and was grabbed and screamed, and the brave Faulks ran upstairs and took a black eye, and Miss Winslow took the count, and when we arrived there wasn't a burglar in sight. Yes, there was some luck about."

"Not for Sally," said her sister.

"No," said Reggie thoughtfully. "No, but there was a lot of luck going." He surveyed them through his cigar smoke with a bland smile.

"What do you think I ought to do, Fortune?" said Tom Beach.

"Go to bed," said Reggie. "What's the time? Time runs on, doesn't it? Yes, go to bed."

"Oh, but, Mr. Fortune, you are disappointing," Alice Beach cried.

"I am. I notice it every day. It's my only vice."

"I do think you might be interested!"

"A poor crime, but her own," Captain Cosdon chuckled. "It's no good, Mrs. Beach. It don't appeal to the master mind."

"You know, Fortune, it's devilish awkward," the Colonel protested.

"I'm sorry. But what can we do? You might call up your village policeman. He's four miles off, and I dare say he needs exercise. You might telephone to Thornton and say you have been burgled, and will they please watch some road or other for some one or other with a bag of silver and a set of cameos and a ruby brooch. It doesn't sound helpful, does it?"

"It sounds damned silly."

"But I thought you'd find clues, Mr. Fortune," Alice Beach cried, "all sorts of clues, finger-prints and foot-prints and——"

"And tell us the crime was done by a retired sergeant-cook with pink hair and a cast in the eye," Cosdon grinned.

"You see, I've no imagination," said Reggie sadly.

"Confound you, Cosdon, it isn't a joke," Colonel Beach cried.

"No, I don't think it's a joke," Reggie agreed.

"One of your perfect crimes, Mr. Fortune?"

"Well, I was sayin'—you have to allow for chance. There was a lot of luck about."

"What are you thinking of?"

"The time, Mrs. Beach. Yes, the flight of time. We'd better go to bed."

But he did not go to bed. He stirred the fire in his bedroom and composed himself by it. The affair annoyed him. He did not want to be bothered by work and his mind insisted on working. Something like this. "Philosophically time is an illusion. 'Time travels

in divers paces with divers persons' Highly divers, yes Time is the trouble, Colonel Why was there such a long time between the first scream and the second scream? Sally tumbled down Sally was fumbling in the dark but it don't take many minutes to get from her room to the stairs She took as long as it took the chauffeur to run to the power-house He started some while after the first scream, he had found what was wrong and put the light on again within a minute of the second Too much time for Sally—and too little How did Sally's burglars get off so quick? Faulks ran up at the second scream The rest of us were there next minute They were there to hit Faulks When we came, we saw no one, heard no one and found no one " He shook his head at the firelight "And yet Sally's rather a dear I wonder No, it didn't go according to plan But I don't like it, my child It don't look pretty "

He sat up Somebody was moving in the corridor He went to his table for an electric torch, slid silently across the room, flung open the door and flashed on the light He caught a glimpse of legs vanishing round a corner, legs which were crawling, a man's legs A door was closed stealthily

Reggie swept the light along the floor It fell at last on some spots of candle grease dropped where the fallen Sally was examined Thereabouts the legs had been He moved the light to and fro Close by stood an old oak settle He swept the light about it, saw something beneath it flash and picked up Mrs Faulk's big ruby brooch

The early morning, which he does not love, found him in the garden There under Sally's window the ladder still stood "That came from the potting sheds, sir," his factotum Sam told him "Matter of a hundred yards " Together they went over the path and away to the little power-house by the stream. The ground was still hard from the night frost

"Not a trace," Reggie murmured "Well, well Seen anybody about this morning, Sam?"

"This morning, sir?" Sam stared "Not a soul "

"Have a look," said Reggie and went in shivering

He was met by the butler who said nervously that Colonel Beach had been asking for him and would like to see him in the study There he found not only Colonel Beach but Mrs Beach and Sally and Captain Cosdon, a distressful company It was plain that Mrs Beach had been crying Sally was on the brink Cosdon looked like a naughty boy uncertain of his doom But the Colonel was tragic, the Colonel was taking things very hard

Reggie Fortune beamed upon them "Morning, morning Up already, Miss Winslow? How's the head?"

Sally tried to say something and gulped Tom Beach broke out "Sorry to trouble you, Fortune It's an infernal shame dragging you into this business " He glared at his wife, and she wilted

"My dear Colonel, it's my job," Reggie protested cheerfully, and edged towards the fire which the Colonel screened

"I'm awfully sorry, Colonel I'm the one to blame," Cosdon said "It's all my fault, don't you know"

"I don't know whose fault it isn't I know it's a most ghastly mess"

"It's just like a snowball," Alice laughed hysterically "Our snowball burglary"

"Snowball?" the Colonel roared at her.

"Oh, Tom, you know When you want subscriptions and have a snowball where every one has to get some one else to subscribe I thought of it and I brought in Sally and Sally brought in Bunny and then Mr Faulks came in—poor Mr Faulks—and then Mrs Faulks got into it and her rubies"

"And now we're all in it, up to the neck"

"Yes Yes, that's very lucid," said Reggie "But a little confusing to an outsider My brain's rather torpid, you know I only want to get on the fire" He obtained the central position and sighed happily "Well now, the workin' hypothesis is that there were no burglars. Somebody thought it would be interesting to put up a perfect crime For the benefit of the guileless expert"

They were stricken by a new spasm of dismay They stared at him "Yes, you always knew it was a fake," Cosdon cried "I guessed that last night when you kept talking about the time"

"Well, I thought a little anxiety would be good for you Even the expert has his feelings"

"It was horrid of us, Mr Fortune," Sally cried "But it wasn't only meant for you"

"Oh, don't discourage me"

"It was all my fault, Mr Fortune" Alice put in her claim and looked at him ruefully and then began to laugh "But you did seem so bored——"

"Oh, no, no, no Only my placid nature Well now, to begin at the beginning Somebody thought it would be a merry jest to have me on That was you, Mrs Beach For your kindly interest, I thank you"

Mrs Beach again showed signs of weeping

"Please don't be horrid, Mr Fortune," said Sally fervently

"I'm trying to be fascinating But you see I'm so respectable You unnerve me"

"I thought of a burglary," said Mrs Beach, choking sobs "And I asked Sally to do it"

"And she did—all for my sake Well, one never knows," Reggie sighed, and looked sentimental

"It wasn't you," said Sally "I wanted to shock Mr Faulks"

"Dear, dear I shouldn't wonder if you have"

"Oh!" Sally shuddered "That man is on my nerves He simply follows me about He scares me When I found he'd got Tom to ask him here I——"

"Yes, of course, it's my fault," Tom Beach cried, "I knew it would come round to that"

"You didn't know, dear, how could you?" Sally soothed him "He doesn't make love to you Well, he was here and his mamma and—oh, Mr Fortune, you've seen them They want shocking So I talked to Bunny and——"

"And I came in with both feet," said Captain Cosdon "My scheme really, Fortune, all my scheme"

"All?" Reggie asked with some emphasis

"Good Lord, not what's happened"

"I thought we should come to that some day What did happen?"

And they all began to talk at once From which tumult emerged the clear little voice of Sally "Bunny slipped out early and put a garden ladder up at my window and then went off to the powerhouse When I went to bed, I collected Tom's pots from the study—that was because he is so vain of them—and Alice's cameos—that's because they're so dowdy—and locked them in my trunk Then I screamed at the window That was the signal for Bunny and he switched the lights out and came back All that was what we planned" She looked pathetically at Reggie "It was a good crime, wasn't it, Mr Fortune?"

"You have a turn for the profession, Miss Winslow You will try to be too clever It's the mark of the criminal mind"

"I say, hang it all, Fortune——" Cosdon flushed

"I know I spoilt it," said Sally meekly "I just stood there, you know, hearing Tom roar downstairs and you all fussing——"

"And you underrate the policeman Do I fuss?" Reggie was annoyed

"You're fussing over my morals now Well, I stood there and it came over me the burglars just had to have something of Mrs Faulks's" She gurgled "That would make it quite perfect So I ran into her room and struck a match and there was her awful old ruby brooch I took that and went out into the passage and screamed again That was the plan Then I bumped into somebody——"

"That was me," said Captain Cosdon "She was such a jolly long time with the second scream I went up to see if anything was wrong——"

"Yes The criminal will do too much," Reggie sighed

"Then Faulks came He tumbled into us and hit out, silly ass I heard Sally go down and I let him have it Confound him"

Sally smiled at him affectionately

"Oh yes, it's devilish funny, isn't it?" cried Tom Beach "Good

God, Cosdon, you're not fit to be at large A nice thing you've let me in for "

"Well, you've all been very ingenious," said Reggie "Thanks for a very jolly evening May I have some breakfast?"

There was a silence which could be felt

"Mr Fortune," said Sally, "that awful brooch is gone"

"Yes, that's where we slipped up," said Cosdon "Sally must have dropped it when that fool knocked her out I went out last night to hunt for it and it wasn't there"

"Really?"

Reggie's tone was sardonic and Cosdon flushed at it "What do you mean?"

"Well, somebody found it, I suppose That's the working hypothesis"

He reduced them to the dismal condition in which he found them "There you are!" Colonel Beach cried "Some one of the servants saw the beastly thing and thought there was a chance to steal it It's a ghastly business I'll have to go through them for it and catch some poor devil who would have gone straight enough if you hadn't played the fool It's not fair, confound it"

There was a tap at the door Mrs Faulks was asking if the Colonel would speak to her The Colonel groaned and went out.

"Do you mind if I have some breakfast, Mrs Beach?" said Reggie plaintively

They seemed to think him heartless but offered no impediment A dejected company slunk downstairs It occurred to Reggie, always a just man, that Sam also might be hungry and he ran out to take him off guard

When he came back to the breakfast-room, he found that Faulks had joined the party It was clear that no one had dared to tell him the truth They were gazing in fascinated horror at the many colours which swelled about his right eye, and his scowl was terrible

"Hallo, Faulks! Stout fellow," said Reggie, brightly "How's the head?"

Mr Faulks turned the scowl on him Mr Faulks found his head very painful He had had practically no sleep He feared some serious injury to the nerves He must see a doctor And his tone implied that as a doctor and a man Reggie was contemptible

Reggie served himself generously with bacon and mushrooms and began to eat No one else was eating but Mr. Faulks He, in a domineering manner, smote boiled eggs The others played with food like passengers in a rolling ship

The door was opened The austere shape of Mrs Faulks stalked in and behind her Tom Beach slunk to his place Mrs Faulks's compressed face wore a look of triumph

Sally half rose from her chair "Oh, Mrs Faulks," she cried, "have you found your rubies?"

"Really!" said Mrs Faulks with a freezing smile "No, Miss Winslow, I have not found my rubies"

"What are you going to do about it?"

Mrs Faulks stared at her "I imagine there is only one thing to be done I have desired Colonel Beach to send for the police I should have thought that was obvious"

"Oh, Tom, you mustn't!" Sally cried

"Really! My dear, you don't realise what you're saying"

"Yes, I do You don't understand, Mrs Faulks, you see it was like this——" and out it all came with the Colonel trying to stop it in confused exclamations, and Mrs Faulks and her heavy son sinking deeper and deeper into stupefaction

"The whole affair was a practical joke?" said Faulks thickly

"That's the idea, old thing," Cosdon assured him

"Yes, yes, don't you see it?" Sally giggled

"I never heard anything so disgraceful," Faulks pronounced

"I say, go easy," Cosdon cried

Mrs Faulks had become pale "Am I expected to believe this?" she looked from Tom to Alice

"Oh, Mrs Faulks, I am so sorry," Alice Beach said "It was too bad And it's really all my fault"

"I—I—you say you stole my rubies?" Mrs Faulks turned upon Sally

"Come, come, the child took them for a joke," Colonel Beach protested

"I took them, yes—and then I lost them I'm most awfully sorry about that"

"Are you indeed Am I to believe this tale, Colonel Beach? Then pray who stole my diamond necklace?"

She produced an awful silence She seemed proud of it, and in a fascination of horror the conspirators stared at her

"Diamond necklace!" Sally cried "I never saw it"

"My necklace is gone I don't profess to understand the ideas of joking in this house But my necklace is gone"

"Oh, my Lord," said Cosdon "That's torn it"

"The snowball!" Alice gasped "It is a snowball Everything gets in something else"

"Really!" said Mrs Faulks (her one expletive) "I do not understand you"

Reggie arose and cut himself a large portion of cold beef

"If this was a practical joke," said the solemn voice of Faulks, "who struck me?"

"That was me, old thing," Cosdon smiled upon him

"But strictly speakin'," said Reggie as he came back and took more toast, "that's irrelevant."

"Colonel Beach!" Mrs Faulks commanded the wretched man's attention, "what do you propose to do?"

"We shall have to have the police," he groaned

"Oh, yes, it's a case for the police," said Reggie cheerfully "Have you a telegraph form, Colonel?"

"It's all right, Fortune, thanks "I'll telephone"

"Yes, encourage local talent But I would like to send a wire to Scotland Yard"

"Scotland Yard!" Mrs Faulks was impressed Mrs Faulks smiled on him

"Well, you know, there are points about your case, Mrs Faulks I think they would be interested"

Like one handing his own death warrant, Colonel Beach put down some telegraph forms Reggie pulled out his pencil, laid it down again and took some marmalade "Valuable necklace, of course, Mrs Faulks?" he said blandly "Quite so The one you wore the night before last? I remember I remember" He described it Mrs Faulks approved and elaborated his description "That's very clear Are your jewels insured? Yes, well that is a certain consolation" He adjusted his pencil and wrote "I think this will meet the case" He gave the telegram to Mrs Faulks

Mrs Faulks read it, Mrs Faulks seemed unable to understand She continued to gaze at it, and the wondering company saw her grow red to the frozen coils of her hair

Reggie was making notes on another telegraph form He read out slowly a precise description of the lost necklace "That's it, then," he said "By the way, who are you insured with?"

Mrs Faulks glared at him "I suppose this is another joke"

"No," Reggie shook his head "This has gone beyond a joke"

"Where is my brooch, then? Who has my brooch?"

"I have," said Reggie He pulled it out of his pocket and laid it on her plate "I found the brooch in the passage I didn't find the necklace, Mrs Faulks So I should like to send that telegram"

"You will do nothing of the kind I won't have anything done The whole affair is disgraceful, perfectly disgraceful I forbid you to interfere Do you understand, I forbid it? Colonel Beach! It is impossible for me to stay in your house after the way in which you have allowed me to be treated Please order the car"

She stalked out of the room

"Fortune!" said Faulks thunderously "Will you kindly explain yourself?"

"I don't think I need explaining But you might ask your mother. She kept the telegram" And to his mother Mr Faulks fled

"Good God, Fortune, what have you done?" Tom Beach groaned

"Not a nice woman," said Reggie sadly "Not really a nice woman" He stood up and sought the fire and lit a cigar and sighed relief

"Mr Fortune, what was in that telegram?" Sally cried

Reggie sat down on the cushioned fender "I don't think you're really a good little girl, you know," he shook his head at her and surveyed the company "Broadly speakin' you ought all to be ashamed of yourselves Except the Colonel"

"Please, Mr Fortune, I'll never do it again," said Alice plaintively "Tom——" she sat on the arm of her husband's chair and caressed him

"All right, all right," he submitted "But I say, Fortune, what am I to do about Mrs Faulks?"

"She's done all there is to do No, not a nice woman"

Sally held out her small hands "Please! What did you say in that telegram?"

"Lomas, Scotland Yard Jewel robbery Colonel Beach's house curious features tell post office stop delivery registered packet posted Cranston this morning nine examine contents Reginald Fortune Cranston Regis"

"I don't understand"

"She did Sorry to meddle with any one in your house, Colonel But she would have it You won't have any trouble"

"But what's the woman done?" the Colonel cried

"Well, you know, she's been led into temptation When she thought burglars had taken her brooch it seemed to her that she might as well recover from the insurance people for something else too That's the worst of playing at crime, Mrs Beach You never know who won't take it seriously What made me cast an eye at Mrs Faulks was her saying last night that she wasn't sure whether she had lost anything else I can't imagine Mrs Faulks not sure about anything She's sure she's an injured woman now And I'll swear she always has an inventory of all her jeweller's shop in her head"

"She has," said Alice Beach pathetically "You should hear her talk of her jewels"

"Heaven forbid But you see, Miss Winslow, it's the old story, you criminals always try to be too clever She thought it wouldn't be enough to say she'd lost her diamonds She wanted them well out of the way so that the police could search and not find them So she scurried off to the post office and sent them away in a registered packet Thus, as you criminals will, underratin' the intelligence of the simple policeman My man Sam was looking out to see

if any one did anything unusual this morning and he observed Mrs Faulks's manœuvres at the post office——”

“And you had her cold!” Cosdon cried

“Yes Yes, a sad story ”

“She didn't really mean any harm,” said Sally “Did she, Mr Fortune?”

Reggie looked at her sadly “You're not a moral little girl, you know,” he said

Philip Trent

THE INOFFENSIVE CAPTAIN

By

E C BENTLEY

"INSPECTOR CHARLES B MUIRHEAD Introduced by Chief Inspector W Murch" Trent was reading from a card brought to him as he sat at breakfast "I had no idea," he remarked to his servant, "that Mr Murch was introducing a new kind of policeman What does he look like, Dennis?"

"He might be anything, sir A very ordinary looking man, I should say"

"Well, that's the highest compliment you could pay a plain-clothes officer, I suppose"

Trent finished his coffee and stood up "Show him into the studio And if he should happen to arrest me, telephone to Mr Ward that I am unfortunately detained and cannot join him this evening"

"Certainly, sir"

The two men who came together in Philip Trent's studio looked keenly at each other The police officer, who did not much approve of the mission on which he had been sent, was not reassured by what he saw Trent was at this time—it was a few years before the unravelling of the Manderson affair came to change his life—a man not yet thirty, with an air of rather irresponsible good humour and an easy, unceremonious carriage of his loose-knit figure that struck his visitor as pleasing in general, but not in keeping with great mental gifts His features were regular, his short, curling hair and moustache, and, indeed, his whole appearance, suggested a slight but not defiant carelessness about externals

Mr Muirhead, knowing nothing of modern painters, thought this quite right in an artist, but he wondered what could have led such a man to interest himself in police problems

As for Inspector Muirhead, he was a lean, light-haired, upstanding man with a scanty yellow moustache, dressed in an ill-fitting dark suit, with a low collar much too large for his neck The only noticeable things about him were an air of athletic hardness, and a pair of blue eyes like swords He looked like a Cumberland shepherd who had changed clothes with a rent-collector

"I am very glad," said Trent, "to meet any friend of Inspector Murch's Sit down and have a cigar Not a smoker? So much the

worse for the criminal class—you look as if your nerves were made of steel wire. Now, let me hear what it is you want of me.”

The hard-featured officer squared his shoulders and put his hands on his knees. “Inspector Murch thought you might be willing to help us unofficially, Mr Trent, in a little difficulty we are in. It concerns the escape of James Rudmore from Dartmoor yesterday afternoon.”

“I hadn’t heard of it.”

“It’s in the papers to-day—the bare fact. But the details are unusual. For one thing, he’s got clear away, which has happened only in a very few cases at Dartmoor. Rudmore did what others have done—made a bolt from one of the gangs doing outdoor labour, taking advantage of a mist coming on suddenly. But instead of wandering on the moor till he was taken again, as they mostly do, he got on a road some miles from the prison, where he had the luck to meet a motor-car, going slowly in the mist. He jumped out in front of the car, and when the chauffeur stopped it Rudmore sprang at him and gave him a knock on the head with a stone that stunned him. The car belongs to an American gentleman and his wife, by name Van Sommeren, who were touring about the country.”

“Gratifying for them,” remarked Trent. “They will feel the English are not making strangers of them—that we are taking them to our bosom, as it were.”

“Mr Van Sommeren drew a revolver,” pursued the detective stolidly, “and shot twice before Rudmore closed with him. He managed to get hold of the weapon after a struggle, and so had them at his mercy. He was hurt slightly in the arm by one of the shots, Mr Van Sommeren thinks. Rudmore made him give up his motor-coat and cap, and all he had in his pockets, also the lady’s purse. Then he put on the coat and cap over his convict dress and drove off alone, going eastward. The others waited till the chauffeur was all right again, then made the best of their way along the road on foot. It was hours before they got to Two Bridges and told their story.”

“He managed it well,” Trent observed, lighting a pipe. “Decision and promptitude. He ought to have been a soldier.”

“He was,” returned Mr Muirhead. “He had been, at least. But the point is, where is he now? We now know that he drove the car as far as Exeter, where he abandoned it outside the railway station, taking with him two large suitcases and a dressing-bag. There can be no doubt that he came on by train to London, arriving last night. He has particular business here, as well as friends who would help him. Do you remember the Danbury pendant affair, Mr Trent? It’s nearly two years ago now.”

“I don’t. Probably I was not in England at the time.”

"Then I may as well tell you the story of it and the Rudmores. You must know it if you're to assist us. Old John Rudmore was for many years a doctor in very good practice in Calcutta—had been an army doctor at first. He was a widower, a man of good family, highly educated, very clever and popular. His only son was James Rudmore, who was a lieutenant in a Bengal cavalry regiment, very much the same sort of man as his father. There was a daughter, too—a young girl. Six years ago, when James was twenty-three, something happened—something to do with old Rudmore, it is believed. It was kept dark quite successfully, but the word went out against the Rudmores. The old man threw up his practice, and the son sent in his papers. All three of them came home and settled in London. The Rudmores had influential connections, and Jim got a soft job under the Board of Trade. His sister went to live with some relatives of her mother's. The father made his headquarters in bachelor chambers in Jermyn Street. He travelled a good deal and was interested in mining properties. He seemed to have amassed a great deal of money, and it was believed he made his son a considerable allowance."

"Was there supposed to be anything wrong about the money?"

"That we don't know, but what happened afterward makes it seem likely. Well, James Rudmore went the pace considerably. He got into a gambling, dissipated set, and wasn't particular about what friends he made. He was intimate with some of the shadiest characters in sporting circles—people we'd had an eye upon more than once. He was a reckless, desperate chap, with a dangerous temper when roused, and he was well on his way to being a regular wrong 'un when the affair of the pendant happened, but he was very clever and amusing, and had a light-hearted way with him, a gentleman all over to look at, and hadn't lost caste, as they say,"

Trent nodded appreciatively. "You describe him to the life. I should like to have known him."

"One day there was a big garden-party at Danbury House, and he was there helping with some sort of entertainment. Lady Danbury was wearing the pendant, which was a famous family jewel containing three remarkable diamonds and some smaller stones. It was late in the afternoon before she found that the chain it was attached to had broken and the pendant was gone. By that time many of the guests had gone, too, and James Rudmore among them. A search was begun all over the grounds, but it hadn't gone far when one of the maids, hearing of the loss, came forward with a statement. It seemed she had been philandering with one of the men servants in a part of the grounds where she'd no business to be, the countess had been receiving people there, but it was deserted at the time. The man's eye was caught by something on the grass, and the girl, going nearer to it, recognised the pendant."

Just as she was hurrying forward to pick it up, they heard steps on the path, and thinking it might be one of the upper servants, who would make trouble about her being out there, they both stepped behind a clump of shrubbery. They saw James Rudmore come round the corner of the path. He was alone and seemed to be looking for something on the ground. He caught sight of the pendant and stood gazing at it a moment. Then he picked it up and, holding it in his hand, went on toward the place where the company were. That was all that the two saw. Naturally, they thought he was carrying the thing straight to the countess, it never occurred to them that a man of young Rudmore's appearance would steal it."

"It was a silly thing to do," Trent remarked.

"He was in a tight place," explained the detective. "It came out afterward that he was deeply in debt and had just dropped a good sum on the Stock Exchange. He wanted money desperately."

"He had one resource," suggested Trent. "I have heard it described as tapping the ancestor."

"The ancestor," said Mr. Murhead with a hard smile, "was away on his travels, looking into some East African mining proposition, and apparently couldn't be got at. Besides, as you'll see, tapping him might not have been much good, and James no doubt knew that, for their relations were always very close and confidential. But as I was saying, The two witnesses told their story about the finding of the pendant. An hour afterward I was out after James with a warrant in my pocket. About nine o'clock I arrested him as he walked into the hotel where he lived. He denied the charge with a show of astonishment and indignation, but he made no resistance. The pendant was not on him then, and it was never found. I took him away in a taxicab. In Panton Street he gave me a blow on the jaw that knocked me out, jumped from the cab, and darted round the corner into Whitcomb Street. There he ran into the arms of a constable, who held him, he fought savagely, and was only secured by the help of two men. He didn't get away again."

"Until yesterday," Trent observed. "Where had he been between leaving Danbury House and returning to his hotel?"

"Apparently at a club in the Adelphi, where he played billiards for an hour and then dined. His story was that he'd walked there straight from Danbury House and gone straight from there to his hotel. It couldn't be shown that he'd been anywhere else, but nobody knew exactly when he had left Danbury House. His line at the trial was that he knew absolutely nothing of the pendant and that it was a plot to ruin him. The case against him was unanswerable, and the assaults on the police, of course, made the matter much worse. He was sent to penal servitude."

"Then you think he has his booty hidden somewhere, waiting for him to take it when he comes out?"

"Sure of it," the detective replied "Doesn't it stand to reason? He was ruined anyway, and the assaults which his temper had led him into made a heavy sentence certain. He might as well have something to show for it when it was all over."

"Just so. Well, then, inspector, where do I come in?"

Mr Muirhead drew out a pocket-book.

"Three weeks before his escape James Rudmore, who had been a model prisoner from the first, was allowed the privilege of writing a letter, in accordance with the regulations. He wrote to his father. Now it so happened that old Rudmore had then been himself in jail six months or more. I had arrested him, too. The charge was fraudulent bankruptcy, and it was as clever a piece of crooked work as ever came into court, I should think. I took him at his rooms, and he went like a lamb, pleaded guilty and took his dose without any fuss."

"A philosopher," said Trent "So he never got the letter from James?"

"Certainly not. James Rudmore was informed, in accordance with the regulations, that his letter could not be forwarded, the reason being withheld. He then asked to have it back, and that was a mistake, for the governor of Dartmoor had already taken it into his head that there was something more than met the eye in the letter, and that made him certain of it. He believed it contained a secret message telling old Rudmore where the pendant was. Why he thought so I don't myself know, but it was likely enough, of course. The letter was forwarded to Scotland Yard and has been gone over carefully by the experts. They can make nothing of it."

"That is probably just because they are experts," Trent commented "You want a really scatter-brained man—or shall we call him a man of tropically luxuriant mental gifts?—such as myself, for example, to deal with the little dodges of people like the Rudmores. I know now what it is your people want of me. They think the hiding place of the jewel is described in that letter, and that if they can discover it, and mount guard over it, they will soon get James. I am to give an opinion on the letter. There is nothing I should like better. Where is it?"

The inspector, without reply, drew a folded paper from his pocket-book and handed it to Trent. He read the following written in a firm and legible handwriting—

"MY DEAR DAD

"I am writing to you, the first time I am allowed, to say how sorry I am for all the misery my disgrace must have caused

you When I was made a scapegoat, it was the thought of how you would feel the dishonour to our name that hurt me most

"I wish I could have seen you just once before I was put away here But you, at least, will never have doubted my innocence, I know It would be the end for me, indeed, if when I were free again I should find even your door closed against me

"I am strong and well, in better health than I have been for years Most of the time I have been set to what is really navvy's work in the open air, reclaiming waste land At first it was fearfully hard work, and I used to wish I had a hinge in my back, and as many arms as the idol, whose name I forget, on your mantel-shelf But I soon got hardened I have not lived an out-of-door life regularly for some years, and it has made me a new man I feel trained to a hair I did have one bad bout of fever, though, before I got fit I fancy the climate here is rather hard on one if one has malaria in one's system, and isn't up to the mark, the country looks and smells rather like the Gelderland country round Apeldijk, where you remember I was laid up three years But this was a much worse attack I was light-headed for days and felt like dying Isn't it somebody in Shakespeare who talks about 'the wretch whose fever-weakened joints buckle under life?' I felt exactly like that

"I would like to tell you about the life we lead here, and my opinion of the system, but all I write has to pass under the officials' eyes, and 'sie wurden das nicht so hingehen lassen,' as old Schraube used to say

"I send this to the old rooms in Jermyn Street, trusting it will reach you Good-bye

"Your loving son,
"JIM"

Trent read this through carefully once Then he looked at Inspector Muirhead with a meditative eye "Well?" demanded that officer

"This," said Trent, "is what judges in lawsuits call a very proper letter, meaning, usually, a letter with a faint flavour of humbugging artificiality about it. I don't like the note of its pathos and I think there's some hanky-panky about it somewhere It contains one passage which must be an absolute lie, I should say"

"I don't know which you mean," the inspector replied, "but all the statements about himself in prison are true enough He did have a bad illness——"

"Yes, naturally all those are true, he knew the letter would be read by the authorities, of course I didn't mean anything of that sort Look here, I should like to spend some time with this in a

reference library Will you meet me outside the British Museum one hour from now?"

"Right, Mr Trent!" The detective rose quickly "You'll find me waiting There may be no time to lose"

But it was the inspector who found Trent awaiting him fifty minutes later, with a taxicab in attendance

"Jump in," said Trent "The man knows where to go It didn't take very long after all I even had time to dash up into Holborn and buy this" He produced a stout screw-driver from his pocket

"What on earth for?" inquired Mr Muirhead blankly as the cab rushed westward "Where are we going? What have you made of the letter?"

"Inquisitive!" Trent murmured, shaking his finger at him gravely His eyes were shining with suppressed elation and expectancy

"What is the screw-driver for? Well, you surely will admit that it is prudent to be armed when going after a dangerous man I got it of Lake and Company, so I am going to call it Excalibur Come, inspector, I ask you as a reasonable man, what else could one call it? Then, as to where we are going—we are going to Jermyn Street"

"Jermyn Street!" Mr Muirhead was staring at his companion as at some strange animal "You think the stuff is there?"

"I think the letter says it is—or was—hidden in old Rudmore's rooms"

"But I told you, Mr Trent, old Rudmore was hundreds of miles away when the theft took place His rooms were locked up"

"Yes, but isn't it likely James had a key to them? You told me they were on terms of great mutual confidence The father was quite likely to leave a key with his son, in case it should prove useful—and a latch-key to the front door, too, I dare say"

The inspector nodded gloomily "Yes—it's quite likely Then I suppose your idea is, he just walked round to Jermyn Street with the pendant, let himself in, went upstairs to his father's rooms, tucked the thing away, and then strolled on to the club Certainly it's possible Only nobody happened to think of it"

"I don't know that anything would have been found if anybody had, with all regard and reverence to you and your friends, inspector I doubt if anything could have been done without the indications in this letter"

"Well, what does——"

"No! Here we are in Jermyn Street What number, inspector? 230—right!" Trent leaned out of the window and instructed the driver The cab drew up before a shoemaker's shop of such supreme distinction that only three unostentatious pairs were placed, as if they had been left there by accident, in the window.

To the left of the shop was a closed private door for the use of those living in the chambers above

The inspector's ring was answered by an extremely corpulent, mulberry-faced man with snowy side-whiskers and smooth, white hair. His precision of dress and manner, with a certain carriage of the body, proclaimed the retired butler.

"Well, Hudson, have you forgotten me?" asked the detective pleasantly, stepping into the well-kept but gloomy little hall. The stout man hesitated, then said, "Bless my soul! It's the officer who came to take Mr Rudmore." His face lost something of its over-ripe appearance, and he added, as he closed the door, "I do hope it's not another business of that sort. My house will be getting the name of——"

"Now don't you worry yourself," the man of authority advised him. "I'm not after anybody in your house. I only want to know if the rooms that old Rudmore had are occupied at present."

"They are, inspector. They were taken, shortly after that unfortunate affair, by Captain Ainger, who has them still—a military gentleman, invalided home from India, I believe, a very pleasant, quiet gentleman——"

"Is he at home now?"

"Captain Ainger never goes out until luncheon-time."

"Then we want to see him. Don't you trouble to come up, Hudson, stairs don't agree with you, I can see that. It's the second floor, I remember."

"Second floor, and the door on the left. And I do hope, gentlemen——" Hudson withdrew, murmuring vague apprehension, and ponderously descending to the basement floor as Mr Muirhead, followed by Trent, went up the narrow stairs.

"I thought it better," said the inspector, pausing on a stair, "to go up unannounced. He can't say he won't see us if we just walk in and make ourselves pleasant."

As the two men reached the first landing they heard the sound of a door closed gently on the one above and of light-stepping feet. A tall girl, in neat and obviously expensive tailor-made clothes, appeared at the head of the short stairway and, apparently not seeing them, stood for a moment adjusting her hat and veil. Mr Muirhead uttered a growling cough from below, at the noise of which the young lady started slightly and hurried down the stairs. In the half-light on the landing, they received, as she passed them, an impression of shining dark hair and barely perceptible perfume. Trent looked after her meditatively as she went swiftly along the ground floor passage and let herself out.

"Smart woman," observed the inspector appreciatively, as the front door slammed.

"A fine example of healthy modern girlhood," Trent agreed.

"Did you see the stride and swing as she went to the door? From the cut of her clothes I should say she was American"

There was a note in his voice which made the other look at him sharply

"And," pursued Trent, returning his gaze with an innocent eye, "I suppose you noticed her feet and ankles as she stood up there and as she came downstairs"

"I did not," returned Mr Muirhead gruffly "What was there to notice?"

"Only the size," said Trent "The size—and the fact that she was wearing a man's shoes"

For an instant the inspector glared at him wild-eyed, then turned and plunged without a word down the stairway He reached the door and tore at the handle

"It's locked! Double locked from outside! Here, Hudson!" he bellowed, and swore loud and savagely as the fat man was heard shuffling across the passage in the basement below and labouring heavily up the stairs "Give me your latch-key!" he commanded, as Hudson, with a staring housemaid in his wake, appeared, trembling and gasping For a few moments, filled with vivid language by the enraged officer, the man fumbled at a trousers pocket At last he produced his key Mr Muirhead seized it and endeavoured to thrust it into the keyhole After half a dozen vain attempts he resigned the key to Hudson, who grasped the situation at the first try

"I'm afraid whoever double locked it has left the key in on the other side," he panted "This'll never go in till the other's taken out"

Mr Muirhead suddenly recovered his calm and stuck his hands in his pockets "He's done us," he announced "He could reach Piccadilly in fifteen seconds from here, without hurrying It's a clean get-away Probably he's bowling off in a taxi by now Hudson, why the devil didn't you say there was a lady with the captain? I'd never have let him pass me if I'd known he was coming from those rooms"

"I never knew there was any one with him, indeed, inspector," quavered the old man, his mind wrestling feebly with the confusion of genders "I expect it was this girl let her in"

"How was I to know there was anything wrong?" cried the domestic, bursting into tears "She spoke like a perfect lady and sent me up with her card and all I never thought till this minute——"

"All right, all right, my girl," said the inspector brusquely "You'll get into no trouble if you're straight Hudson, I want your telephone In the back room here? Right! And you'd better hail somebody next door and get your door opened"

The detective disappeared into the room and Hudson shuffled down the passage to the back of the building, still in a dazed condition "What I don't see," he mumbled, "is where she, or he, or whoever it was, got the key from" And he said it, Trent, who had been leaning against the wall with a face of great contentment, suddenly turned and fled lightly up the stairs

Captain Ainger's door opened easily Captain Ainger himself, a small, crop-headed man, lay upon a sofa near the window of his tastefully furnished sitting-room As Trent burst in a look of relief came into the captain's bewildered eyes The rest of his face below them was covered by an improvised gag made out of a tobacco pouch and a tightly-knotted silk scarf His ankles were tied together and his arms lashed to his sides with box cord

He looked wretchedly uncomfortable

Five minutes later, in answer to a call from Trent, Mr Muirhead closed his conversation with Scotland Yard and came upstairs He found Captain Ainger sitting in an armchair, restoring his physical tone with a deep glass of whisky and soda To Trent's account of how he had found that ill-used officer the detective answered only with a grim nod Then, "I suppose it was your latch-key, sir," he said to the victim

"Yes," replied the little captain, "she took my latch-key—he did, I mean Tell you just how it was She sent up her card—his, I should say—well, it was a woman's card, anyhow I put it up here" He rose and took a card from the mantel-shelf

Mr Muirhead glanced at it with curiosity "Of course!" he exclaimed

"Mrs Van Sommeren's card, is it?" asked Trent from his chair by the window

"It is"

"And Mrs Van Sommeren's clothes and hat, and Mrs Van Sommeren's little bag, and Mrs Van Sommeren's own particular perfume—they all went by us just now," Trent remarked, "in company with (I expect) Mr Van Sommeren's shoes and Mr James Rudmore's wig Probably he was a little excited at seeing you, inspector, awaiting him at the bottom of the stairs It needed some nerve for him to stand there fixing his veil without a quiver, and to trip downstairs right into your yearning embrace, as one may say"

Annoyance, self-reproach, menacing resolve and appreciation of the comic side of the episode—all these things were in the inspector's eloquent answering grunt

"If only he had remembered to walk along the lower passage like a lady, instead of like a champion lightweight," Trent resumed, "I don't believe the meaning of the shoes would have burst upon me as it did I daresay his hold on himself began to

go when he saw the street door and safety six steps in front of him Yet that latch-key business was pretty coolly done Jim is certainly a gifted amateur But you were telling us"—he turned to the obviously mystified captain—"how she made her appearance"

"The message with the card," resumed Captain Ainger, who still preserved his pained expression, "was that she would be obliged if I would answer an inquiry on a family matter It made me feel curious, so I said I would see her She had on a very thick veil—he had, I mean——"

"Why not stick to 'she,' Captain," Trent suggested "We should get on quicker, I think"

"Thank you," said the veteran gratefully, "I believe we should The whole thing is so confusing, because she talked just like a woman from beginning to end Where was I? Ah, yes! I couldn't see her face very well, but her voice and style were those of a well-bred woman She told me that a year ago she had lost a brother who was very dear to her, and that on his death-bed he had laid what she called a sacred charge upon her It seemed he had been befriended at some critical time, when he was in India, by an English officer of my name, of whom he had lost sight for many years He wished her, if possible, to find out that officer and place in his hands a memento, something which had belonged to himself, in token of his undying gratitude She had made inquiries and had found me in the first place, but understood there were others of my name in the army list"

"How did Rudmore get hold of your name, I wonder?" mused the inspector "He only got away from Dartmoor yesterday"

"That wouldn't have been difficult for this sort of man," Trent replied "Very likely he got it out of the housemaid who opened the door, before sending up the message"

The captain cursed the absent malefactor feebly and took another drink from his tumbler "I confess I was rather touched Of course I've usually done a man a good turn when it lay in my power, but I couldn't remember having played Providence to an American at any time So I asked what his name was She said their name was Smith Well, you know, I must have run across about fifty Smiths, and I told her so Then she said she had a photograph of him with her She took it out of her bag It was a picture of a good-looking, youngish chap, with the name of a Philadelphia firm on the mount"

"Van Sommeren's photograph," murmured Trent "She carried it about with her You didn't tell me they were on their honeymoon, inspector"

"I felt sure I'd never seen the man," continued Captain Ainger, "but I took it to the window to have a good look And the moment my back was turned she leaped on me and garotted me

There wasn't a chance for me. She was as strong as a tiger, and I'm pretty shaky from a long illness. When I was about at my last gasp she gagged me with that infernal thing, then dragged me into the bedroom and tied me up with my own cord. When I was trussed properly she went through my pockets and took my latch-key, then she carried me back to the bedroom door. She said she was so sorry to be giving me all this trouble and that she always wished women were not so dependent upon men for everything. She put her veil up a little way and helped herself to a whisky and soda and lighted one of my cigars. After that she took a screw-driver out of her bag and went to work at something behind me. I don't know in the least what she was doing, I couldn't move. It took about five minutes, I should say. Then she skipped to the window with something that looked like a wad of cotton-wool in her fingers and began gloating over something I couldn't see. She stood there a long time, smoking and looking out, and then all at once she gave a start and stared down into the street. Just after that I heard the front-door bell ring. And then she—well, she went." The captain's bronzed face went slowly scarlet to the roots of his hair.

"She said good-bye, surely," murmured Trent, looking at him attentively.

"If you must know," burst out the captain with his first show of fierceness, "she said she didn't know how to thank me, and that I was a dear, and might she give me a kiss? So she—she did it." Here his narrative dissolved into unchivalrous expressions. "And then she went out and shut the door. That's all I can tell you." He wearily resorted to his tumbler again.

Trent and the inspector, who had prudently avoided catching each other's eyes during the last part of the story, now conquered their feelings. "What I want to know now," the detective said, "is where the stuff was hidden here. Can you go straight to the place, Mr. Trent, or should we have to search?"

Trent took the convict's letter from his pocket. "Let me tell you how I got at it first," he said. "You will be interested. Captain, you read it." He handed the document to the soldier and gave him a brief account of the circumstances regarding it.

The captain, now highly interested, read it through carefully twice, then handed it to Trent again. "I don't believe I should make anything out of it in a thousand years," he said. "It seems straight enough to me. I should call it an interesting letter, that's all."

"This letter," said Trent, regarding it with a look of unstinted appreciation, "is the most interesting, by a long way, that I have ever read. It tells us, not, I think, where the pendant was hidden, but where the diamonds of the pendant were hidden by Jim

Rudmore before his arrest. What Jim did with the setting I don't know, nor does it matter much. But the diamonds were concealed here, and they are now again, I am afraid, in the possession of Jim."

Inspector Muirhead made an impatient movement. "Come to the point, Mr. Trent," he urged. "What did you pick up from that letter? Where was the stuff hidden?"

"I will tell you first the things I picked up, and how. The first time I read the letter—in your presence, inspector—I checked at the statement that 'the country looks and smells like the Gelderland country around Apeldijk.' When one reads that, it naturally occurs to one's mind that Dartmoor is practically a mountain district, whereas Gelderland is a part of Holland, most of which country is actually below the sea level."

"It didn't occur to *my* mind," observed Captain Ainger. "Therefore," pursued Trent, unconscious of him, "any similarity of look or smell would be rather curious, don't you think? Possibly that was what struck the governor of the prison and aroused his suspicions of the letter. Well, the next thing that pulled me up was the Shakespearean reference. I knew I'd read it in Shakespeare, and yet I felt it was wrong somehow. There were some words missing, I thought. Besides, it didn't look like a prose passage, yet it didn't fit into the decasyllabic form, or any other metre. The only other notion that occurred to me at first glance was that it was an odd thing to quote a German phrase when an English one would have been just as good."

"Then I took the letter to the British Museum library and sat down to the problem in earnest. I said to myself that if there was any cipher in it, it was probably impossible to get at it. But I thought it more likely that the message, if any, was conveyed in the words as they stood. So I asked myself what were the signals that it hung out to a man who would be trying to read some inner meaning into it. What things in it were, by ever so little, out of the common, so that the reader would say to himself, 'This may be a pointer'? And I had to remember that both the Rudmores were said to be clever and cultivated men, who understood each other well."

"Now, to begin with, I thought that 'the idol, whose name I forget, on your mantel-shelf,' was the sort of thing Rudmore *père* would have pondered over. Of course we've all seen those little images of the Hindo goddess with ten arms. Jim Rudmore, who had lived in India for years, said he had forgotten her name. That might possibly be meant to draw attention to the name."

"It's Parvati—heard it thousands of times," the captain interjected.

"Yes, I found that name when I looked up the Hindo mythology. But there's another, by which she is known in Bengal, where

the Rudmores had had their experience of India. There, my book told me, the people call her Doorga. So I noted down both names. Very well, now the next passage that seemed out of the ordinary was that about 'the Gelderland country round Apeldijk.' The first thing I did was to look up Apeldijk in the gazetteer. It mentioned no such place, the nearest thing to it was a town called Appeldoorn, which was in Gelderland sure enough. Then I got a big map and went through Gelderland from end to end. As I expected, it was as flat as a board, and there was no sign of Apeldijk. But I found several towns in Holland ending in 'dijk,' which shows you what a conscientious artist Jim is. Now if he had really been ill at Appeldoorn, as I expect he had been, his father would have got a hint at once. I wrote down to Appeldoorn, and then I began to see light."

Mr Muirhead rubbed his nose with a puzzled air. "I don't see——" he began.

"You will very soon. Next I turned to the odd-looking quotation from Shakespeare. On looking up 'joints' in the Cowden-Clark Concordance I found the passage. It's in 'Henry IV,' where Northumberland says,

"And as the wretch, whose fever-weaken'd joints,
Like strengthless hinges, buckle under life .

"What do you think of that?"

The inspector shook his head.

"Well, then, look at the German phrase *Sie würden das nicht so hingehen lassen* means 'They would not allow that,' or 'They would not pass that over,' or something of that sort. Now suppose a man looking for a suggestion or hint in each of those German words."

Mr Muirhead took the letter and conned the words carefully. "I'm no German scholar," he began, and then his eyes brightened. "Those missing words——" he said.

"Like strengthless hinges," Trent reminded him.

"Well, and here"—the inspector tapped excitedly upon the word *hingehen*—"you've got 'hinge' and 'hen' in English."

"You're there! Never mind the hen, she's not there on business. Lastly, I'll tell you a thing you probably don't know. *Schraube* is the German word for 'screw'."

Mr Muirhead gave his knee a violent blow with his fist.

"Now then!" Trent tore a leaf from his notebook. "I'll put down the words we've got at that were hidden." He wrote quickly and handed the paper to the inspector. Both he and Captain Ainger read the following:

Doorga
Doorn
Hinges
Hinge
Screw

"Also," Trent added, "the word 'door' occurs twice openly in the body of the letter, and the word 'hinge' once. That was to show old Rudmore he was on the right track, if he succeeded in digging out those words. 'Good!' says he to himself. 'The loot is hidden under a screw in a hinge on a door somewhere. Then where?' He turns to the letter again and finds the only address mentioned in it is 'the old rooms in Jermyn Street.' And there you are!"

Trent took his screw-driver from his pocket and went to the open door leading into the captain's bedroom. "Naturally it wouldn't be the outer door, as to get at the hinges one would have to have it standing open." He glanced at the hinges of the bedroom door. "These screws"—he pointed to those on the door-post half of the upper hinge—"have had their paint scratched a little."

In a minute of two he had removed all three screws. The open door sank forward slightly on the lower hinge and the upper one came away from its place on the door-post. Beneath it was a little cavity roughly hollowed out in the wood. Silently the inspector probed it with a penknife.

"The stones are gone, of course," he announced gloomily.

"Certainly gone," Trent agreed. "The stones were in that little piece of cotton-wool the captain saw him handling."

Mr Muirhead rose to his feet. "Well, I don't think they'll go far." As he took up his hat there was a knock at the door and Hudson entered panting, a sharp curiosity in his eyes.

"A messenger boy just brought this for you, inspector," he wheezed, handing a small package to the detective. It was directed in a delicate, sloping handwriting to "Inspector C. B. Muirhead, CID, care of Captain R. Ainger, 230 Jermyn Street."

Hastily the inspector tore it open. It contained a small black suede glove, faintly perfumed. With this was a scrap of paper, bearing these words in the same writing:

"Wear this for my sake—J. R."

Inspector French

EAST WIND

By

FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

INSPECTOR JOSEPH FRENCH of the C I D had handled in his time a great diversity of cases. Of these, some were remarkable for their dramatic setting, some for the terrible nature of the crimes revealed, and some for the brilliant logical analysis by which the inspector reached his result. The case which had its beginning on the famous 10 30 a m Cornish Riviera Limited Express belonged to none of these categories. In it French was shown, not as the abstract reasoner triumphantly reaching the solution of some baffling problem, but as the practical man of affairs, the organiser using with skill and promptitude the great machine of the British police force.

It was towards the end of May and French had been working for several weeks on an intricate case of forgery in South London. He was tired of town and longed to get out of it. When therefore it became necessary for him to interview an old lag who was doing a stretch at Princetown, he was delighted. A breath of the air of Dartmoor would come as a pleasant change from the drab and sordid Lambeth streets.

It was with pleasurable anticipation that he drove to Paddington and took his seat in the train. He had a good deal of work to do before he reached the prison, and as soon as the express settled down into its stride, he got out his papers and began. For some hours he read and noted, then with a sigh of relief he bundled the documents back into his bag and turned his attention to the scenery.

They had just passed Exeter and were running down the river opposite Exmouth. The previous night had been wet, but now the sky had cleared and the sun was shining. Everything had been washed by the rain and looked fresh and springlike. The sea, when they reached it, was calm and vividly blue and contrasted strikingly with the red cliffs and pillars of Dawlish and Teignmouth.

They turned up the estuary of the Teign and ran through Newton Abbott. From here to Plymouth French thought the country less interesting and he turned to a novel which he had thrust into his bag. For a few minutes he read, then he heard a whistle and the brakes began to grind on the wheels.

There was no halt scheduled hereabouts, the train running without a stop from London to Plymouth. Repairing the line or blocked by some other train, French thought. Since he had done that job on the Southern near Whitnass French rather fancied himself as a railway expert.

The speed decreased and presently they stopped at a small station Greenbridge, he saw the name was. With a slight feeling of displeasure he was about to apply himself again to his book when he heard a faint report, and another, and another.

Three distant fog signals, he supposed, and as he knew this was an emergency danger signal, he lowered the window and looked out. He was at the platform side and down the platform he saw a sight which brought him to his feet in the twinkling of an eye.

A hold-up was in progress. Some four carriages down the train a door was open and opposite it stood a man, a big stout fellow in grey with a white mask on his face and a pistol in his raised hand. With it he covered the passengers, none of whom was to be seen, but the guard had alighted and was standing opposite his van, his arms raised above his head.

As French reached the platform two men stepped out of the compartment with the open door. One, medium-sized and dressed in a fawn coat and hat, was also wearing a mask and brandishing a pistol. The other, of about the same height, was without arms or mask, and even at that distance French could sense an eager haste in his movements. The three, the two armed men and the eager one, ran quickly out of the station and immediately the sound of a rapidly accelerating car came from the road.

French dashed to the exit, but the vehicle had disappeared before he reached it. Then he ran back to the compartment from which the men had descended, and which was now surrounded by an excited crowd of passengers. French pushed his way to the front.

In the compartment lay two men in the uniform of prison warders. One was obviously dead, shot through the forehead, the other was hunched up in a corner, apparently unconscious, but with no visible injury.

"I'm a police officer from Scotland Yard," French shouted. "I'll take charge here." He pointed to a couple of the passengers who were crowding round. "Will you gentlemen search the train quickly for a doctor. You others, close the compartment and let no one in except to attend to the man in the corner. Where is there a telephone, guard?"

The moment French had seen the warders' uniforms, he knew what had taken place. Though it was not his business, he happened to be aware that a prisoner was being conveyed to Dartmoor by the train. He was a man named Jeremy Sandes, and French was interested in him because he was one of his own captures.

The crime for which Sandes had been taken was the theft of Lady Ormsby-Keats' jewels from her country house of Dutton Manor, situated about a mile from Epsom. With forged testimonials he had got a job as footman. This gave him his opportunity. It was suspected that Sandes was only one of a gang and that before capture he had managed to pass on his takings to his accomplices, though neither of these assumptions could be proved. At all events not a single pennyworth of the £17,000 odd of jewellery he had stolen had been recovered.

French's inspiring example galvanised the passengers into activity. A doctor was speedily found, and while he was attending to the warder, French and the guard and some of the passengers ran towards the station buildings. The station was little more than a halt, but there was a general waiting-room and a tiny ticket office. Of these, the office was locked. French rattled at the door. "Anybody there?" he shouted.

For answer a dismal groan came from within. French and the guard threw themselves on the door, but it was strongly made and resisted their efforts.

"The seat," French pointed.

On the platform was a heavy wooden seat. Willing hands quickly raised it, and using it as a battering ram, swung it back and brought its end crashing against the door. With the tearing sound of splintering wood the keeper gave way and the door swung open.

In the little office was a single chair and on the chair sat a man in porter's uniform. He was securely gagged with a cloth and bound to the chair with a rope. A few seconds only sufficed to release him. Beyond the possibility of apoplexy from suppressed fury, he seemed none the worse for his experience.

"The big man came in with a mask on his face," he spluttered indignantly, "and before I could move I found myself looking into the wrong end of a gun. Then the second man came in and I was tied up before you could say knife."

"Any one else about the station?" French asked sharply.

"Yes, there's the signalman. They must have tied him up too, else they couldn't have stopped the train."

The signal box was at the end of the platform to the rear and the little party hurried down. It was as the porter suggested. The signalman was seated on a stool, bound and gagged, but uninjured.

He had, he said, been sitting in his box, when he noticed two men pacing the other end of the platform, as if measuring. They disappeared, then a few minutes later they suddenly rushed up the box steps and covered him with their guns. He could do nothing and was at once gagged and bound. He had already accepted the express and pulled off the signals, and the men at once threw the latter to danger. They waited till the departure came through for

the express, acknowledged the signal correctly, then they cut the block and telephone wires. When the train appeared and was slowing down they pulled off the home signal, leaving the distant and starter at danger. This was correct railway practice and showed that they knew what they were doing. The result was that the train pulled up at the platform. When they pulled off the home signal they hurried down to the platform, and were ostensibly reading a time bill with their backs to the line when the train came in. They evidently knew where the prisoner was, for they had been waiting opposite his compartment and opened its door without hesitation.

French heard the story in the briefest outline and then asked for a description of the men. But he could get nothing of value. Between the speed with which everything had happened and the masks which had been worn, only a blurred picture of their assailants had been left in the railwaymen's minds.

He ran back to the train, and holding up his hand for silence, asked if any one had noticed any peculiarity about the men by which they might be recognised. For a moment there was no reply, then a lady in the compartment adjoining that of the tragedy came forward.

She had been in the window and had had plenty of time to observe the big man who had kept guard on the platform. She could not of course see his face, but she was able to describe his clothes. These were quite ordinary except for one point. On the toe of his rather elegant black shoe were three small spots of mud forming the angles of a tiny equilateral triangle.

This was the only clue French could get, but it was of an entirely satisfactory nature. If the big man did not notice the marks and rub them off, they might well lead to his undoing.

French turned again to the railwaymen, asking urgently where was the nearest telephone. The wires in the signal-box being cut, the porter advised application to Farmer Goodbody, who lived three hundred yards up the road. It would be quicker, he said, than travelling on by the train to the next station.

In three minutes French was knocking at the farmer's door and in another two he was speaking to the superintendent in Exeter. He had been extremely quick in his inquiries and not more than ten minutes had elapsed since the crime. The fugitives could not have gone more than seven or eight miles at the most, and prompt action should enable a police ring to be thrown round the area before they could get clear. French however asked that they should not be arrested, but only shadowed.

He was able to supply very fair descriptions of the trio. About the prisoner, Jeremy Sandes, he could give complete information. He had worked at his description so often that he remembered it

in detail As to the others, he knew their height and build, and there was that priceless point about the three spots of mud

The information was passed to Exeter, Plymouth, Okehampton and other centres, as well as to the Yard Arrangements were made about the bodies of the dead warders and then French rang up the nearest village for a car and was driven into Newton Abbott There he was fortunate enough to find a train just about to start for Exeter Forty minutes later he reached police headquarters in that city Superintendent Hambrook was an old friend and received him with effusion

"We've done what you said, inspector," he went on "As far as we have men to do it, all roads have been blocked in a circle from here through Crediton, Okehampton, Tavistock and Plymouth, and we are having the Exmouth ferry and all ports in the area watched That circle is about twenty to twenty-five miles radius as the crow flies and it would take the parties thirty or forty minutes to reach it With luck we'll get them But, French, are you sure you're right in not arresting them? If you lose them now they mayn't be easy to get again "

"I know, super; but I think it's worth the risk What do you suppose this escape was organised for?"

Hambrook closed his right eye "The swag?" he suggested

French nodded "That's it They'd never have committed murder just to help their pal This Sandes has hidden the stuff and the others were left Now they're going to make him fork up "

"And you want to let him find it?"

"He's the only one who can "

"It's an idea," the super admitted doubtfully "But I don't know If it were my case I think I'd go for the bird in the hand "

French's reply was interrupted by a strident ring on the super's telephone bell Hambrook picked up the receiver, handing a second to French

"Constable Cunningham speaking from the London by-pass, Exeter I think we've identified the big man and the prisoner, Sandes They're driving towards London in a Daimler limousine Number AZQ 9999 If we're right, they've changed their clothes The big man is wearing a dark coat and hat, but when we had him out we saw the three spots of mud on his left toe The driver answers the description of Sandes, though his face has been darkened and he's wearing chauffeur's uniform The big man gave the name Mr Oliver Hawke, diamond merchant, of 767^B Hatton Garden and St Austell's, Grabfield Road, Hampstead They stopped at once and were quite civil They said they were coming from the "Burlington Hotel" in Plymouth and going home We let them go and Constable Emerson is following them on the motor-bike The tyres are newish Dunlops "

French was highly delighted "If they're being civil and answering questions it means they've fixed up an alibi and feel safe about it" He rubbed his hands "A diamond merchant! The best fence in the world!"

Hambrook agreed and French went on "I bet you anything you like Hawk's going home as he says If so, we'll get him there, and Sandes too Ring up ahead, will you, super? If he's making for Town we'll call off the pursuit"

While Hambrook was telephoning French had been studying a time-table "There's an express at 5 42," he said "If they go towards London I'll take it I confess I'd like to be in Hampstead to see them arrive Just get the Plymouth men to look up that hotel, will you, super?"

The "Burlington" reported that Mr Hawke and his chauffeur had stayed there for the past two nights and had left for London that day about noon They had taken lunch with them and said they would eat it in the car *en route*

"There's the alibi emerging already," French declared "Why did they take so long between Plymouth and Exeter? Because they stopped for lunch Why were they not seen at any hotel? Because they took it in the car Quite Now the Yard, like a good fellow"

To headquarters French reported what had happened, asking if a Mr Hawke lived and moved and had his being at the addresses given, and if so, what was this gentleman like in appearance? In a short time there was a reply which showed that the man in the car had given his real name

French rose "I'll just get that train if I look sloppy," he said "Well, super, glad to have seen you again If your people come on that other ruffian, I'd shadow him also We think there's still another of them in the gang and we may as well have a shot for the lot"

As French sat thinking over the affair in the up express he saw that there definitely must have been another confederate The two men at Greenbridge had known in which compartment the prisoner was travelling Now it was impossible that they could have evolved this information out of their own inner consciousness It must therefore have been sent to them, and there was only one way in which it could have been obtained Some one had watched the man and his escort entraining at Paddington French wondered could he trace a trunk call or a telegram from Paddington shortly after 10 30 that morning

At Taunton, their first stop, French sent wires in veiled language to the Yard and the Exeter super, asking the former to find out if such a message had been sent, and the latter if Hawke had called anywhere to receive it Then feeling he had done his duty by the

case for the moment, he went to the dining-car for a long-delayed meal.

At nine o'clock French stepped down on to the platform at Paddington and fifteen minutes later was at the Yard. There he found his colleague Inspector Tanner waiting for him.

"I've been handling this stuff of yours," said Tanner. "Your friends are coming up nicely. They were seen passing through Chard, Shaftesbury, Salisbury, Andover and Basingstoke. They dined at Basingstoke and left there half an hour ago. They should be in Hampstead between ten and eleven. We'll go out and see them arrive."

"Get anything about Hawke's business?"

"Small one-man show. Doesn't seem to be much going on. Yet Hawke must be well-to-do, judging by the house he lives in. I went to the office to ask for him. The clerk made no bones about it. Mr Hawke was down at Plymouth on business, but was coming up to-day and would be available to-morrow."

"I thought that part of it would be all right."

"What about arresting him now, French?" Tanner went on earnestly. "If we find him in the company of Sandes we have him, he can't put up any kind of defence. Once we let them separate we'll find the case a darned sight harder to prove."

"And what about the swag?" French returned. "No, we'll take the risk. And there's another point you've missed. As you know, we believe there are four men in the gang. Now we want them all. If we arrest Hawke and Sandes to-night, we may lose the other two. No, let's watch them. we may get the lot. By the way, did you find out anything about that message from Paddington?"

"Yes, we've got something there." Tanner drew a scrap of paper from his pocket. With eagerness French read it. "Quotation required Exodus chapter six verse four." "It was sent at 10 40 from the telegraph office at Paddington," Tanner went on, "to 'Ander-ton, Poste Restante, Plymouth.' It was called for at 11 45 by a man resembling Hawke. Does that give you any light?"

French nodded delightedly. "I should just think it does!" he declared with enthusiasm. "You see it, of course? The sixth carriage from the engine and the fourth compartment. That's what the men were measuring on the platform at Greenbridge. If those post-office people in Plymouth can swear to Hawke, that'll come in handy."

"Pretty sure to, I should think." Tanner glanced anxiously at the clock. "Your friends should have been past Blackwater before now. It's only fifteen miles from Basingstoke and they've left nearly forty minutes." He picked up his telephone and asked for Blackwater. "No sign," he said presently. "I don't like this, French. Have they turned aside?"

French was already examining a large-scale road map

"Reading or Farnham are the obvious places north and south," he answered, "but there are endless roads in between. Give a general call over that area, Tanner."

Tanner did so as quickly as he could and they settled down to wait. As the minutes passed French became more anxious than he cared to show. Had he overreached himself? If so, and if these two got away, it would be a pretty serious thing for him. Yet, he told himself, they *couldn't* get away.

Once again the telephone bell rang. "Blackwater at last," said Tanner with relief. Then his expression changed. "Oh, you have? Good man, sergeant! Splendid! I'll wait for his report." He rang off.

"Blackwater reports that when they didn't turn up he sent a man out on a motor-bike to look for them and he's found them parked up a side road near Basingstoke. He's watching them and will keep us advised what happens."

"What's that for on earth?" French queried.

Tanner shook his head and once more they settled down to wait. And wait they did, endlessly and with growing mystification. Twice at intervals of an hour the constable rang up on an accommodating householder's telephone to say that the men were still sitting in the stationary car, but the third message, when it came at half-past twelve, showed that the halt was over.

"Speaking from Farnham," the constable reported. "About twelve they started and ran here and have gone on towards Guildford. I've asked the Guildford men to have a look out and ring you."

"Guildford!" French exclaimed anxiously. "What in Hades are they going there for?" He glanced at Tanner. On his face was imprinted the same anxiety.

Once again the bell rang. "They've been seen," Tanner reported. "They passed through Guildford four minutes ago in the Leatherhead direction. The Guildford men have already rung up Leatherhead."

Suddenly French started. Leatherhead! Leatherhead was near Epsom. Not more than three or four miles between them. With a rising excitement he wondered if he could guess their destination.

In a moment his mind was made up. He would stake everything on this idea of his. He spoke quickly to Tanner.

Tanner swore. "You can go at once," he answered with equal speed. "The cars are waiting to go to Hampstead. I'll be here if you want anything."

A moment later French was racing down the corridor to the courtyard. There, with Sergeant Carter and a number of plain-clothes men, were two police cars.

"Come on, men," French shouted "Tumble in Hard as you can lick to Epsom" Ten seconds later the cars glided out on to the Embankment and turned south over Westminster Bridge

French had done many a race by car, but seldom had he made such going as on the present occasion Traffic in the streets was at a low ebb and they took full advantage of it They gave way to nothing, slinging across the fronts of trams and causing other motorists to jam on their brakes and complain to the nearest policeman Twice disaster was avoided by a hair's-breadth, and again and again only profound skill saved a spill So, leaving behind them a trail of indignant and exasperated drivers, they rushed on through the streets

Presently they left Town behind them and still further increased their speed The edge of the road became a quivering line in the light of their headlamps and their tyres roared on the asphalt surface The needles of their speedometers rose and rose till for one brief moment on a down-grade straight they touched 65 Their horns were seldom silent, and more than once as they took curves French thanked his stars the road was not greasy

At Epsom they swung quickly in to the police-station A sergeant was waiting on the footpath

"Your car went through seven minutes ago," he said quickly "towards Burgh Heath"

This news practically confirmed French's idea Dutton Manor lay about a mile out along the Burgh Heath road

"Good," he cried with a feeling of relief "After it, drivers"

Once again their tyres roared over the smooth road A mile slipped away in a few seconds

"Steady," said French presently "Stop before you get to that corner"

Round the corner was a straight upon which the Manor front and back drives debouched As the cars came to a stand French leaped out and ran forward with his torch, followed by his men They passed round the corner and reached the straight No car lights were visible ahead

This, however, was scarcely to be expected and they raced on, keeping for the sake of silence along the grass verge Presently they came to the front entrance

With his torch held vertically so as not to betray their presence, French made a hurried examination of the drive It was surfaced with gravel and the recent rain had softened it He could have sworn that no car had passed over it recently Calling softly to his followers, he hurried on along the road

From his investigation at the time of the robbery French knew every inch of the little domain The back drive was a hundred yards farther along the road and this was his new objective

When he shone his torch on to the ground at its entrance he gave a grunt of satisfaction. There entering the drive were fresh tyre marks, fairly new Dunlops. Good for the Exeter constable's observation!

More cautiously they hurried up the drive, the men moving with speed and silence. There was no moon, but the stars gave a certain light. A wind had been blowing earlier, but it had died down and now everything was still. Suddenly French thought he heard a voice. A touch passed down the line and all instantly became rigid.

"Yes, people were moving a short distance ahead and speaking in low tones. French crept stealthily forward.

"—stopped us at Exeter," he heard a man say in low tones, "but they didn't suspect anything and we passed through all right. How did you manage, Taylor?"

"I garaged the car at Newton Abbott and came by train," returned another voice. "I reached Paddington at 6.55, got your phone from Basingstoke, picked up Gould and came on here. What's it all about, Hawke?"

"The swag. Sandes had hidden it here. I thought we ought all to be here in case——"

The speaker must have turned away, for French lost the remainder of the sentence. Crouching back into the hedge, he could now see four figures moving like shadows in front of him. They were entering the drive from a field, obviously after hiding their car. As they turned towards the house, French and his men dropped in behind.

To say that French was delighted would convey no impression of his state of mind. From the first he had felt that only hope of the recovery of the swag could account for the rescue of Sandes. Now his ideas and his actions had been abundantly justified. A little more patience and a little more care and both men and jewels would be his! Something more than a triumph, this! Out of what had seemed defeat he would snatch an overwhelming victory!

The two parties were now silently creeping up the drive with a hundred feet or more between them. Surely, French thought, the quarry would not go near the yard, where there were dogs and where the chauffeur slept? No, they were turning aside. They left the drive through a small gate which led to the side of the house, and began to work forward over grass sward containing flower-beds and a fountain. Here in the open French's little band had to drop back to avoid being seen, but on reaching some clumps of shrubs they closed up again.

French was growing more and more surprised. It was beginning to look as if the others were meditating an attack on the house itself. They were certainly moving on to the very walls. Then sud-

denly French saw where they were going Just in front of them was a loggia He knew it well It was a biggish area, some fifty feet by twenty, and was roofed and bounded by the house on two sides, but save for pillars was open on the third and fourth On it gave a passage from the main hall, as well as french windows from the principal reception-room, while a short flight of stone steps led down to the terrace These steps were in the centre of the longer open side, which faced south-west The short open side faced south-east These sides were edged with a stone balustrade and every few feet were pedestals bearing large stone vases, each containing a laurustinus

French's heart beat more rapidly The end, whatever it might be, was upon them He wondered if he were about to witness house-breaking The french windows would be just the place to try, but as he knew them to be fitted with burglar alarms, he did not think the attempt would succeed Well, if Hawke & Co gave back, believing they had aroused the household, he and his men would be ready for them

Slowly and silently the four men crept up the stone steps to the loggia, and as they disappeared within, French and his followers slipped up against the wall at each side of the steps The floor was some four feet high, and standing on the grass, the watchers could see in between the stone balusters Contrary to French's expectation the quarry did not approach the french windows Instead they moved like shadows over to the north-east corner, where the shorter open side joined the wall of the house French, slipping round the corner, crept along the outside of that short side till he came opposite where they had congregated They had turned a torch on the floor, which gave a faint light in all directions

"All quiet" The whisper came from the man who had been referred to as Hawke "Now, Sandes"

A shadow detached itself from the group and came forward towards French, who shrank down beneath the floor-level "'Ere in this 'ere vase," he heard in a Cockney whisper "It were the nearest place outside the 'ouse I could find and because of the east wind no one sits in this 'ere corner"

Slowly French raised his head With a thrill of excitement which he would have died rather than admit, he watched the man put his hand over the edge of the vase and feel about Then the man gave a sudden grunt, snatched the torch from Hawke, and shone it into the basin Finally, throwing all caution to the winds, he began to grope wildly The others had closed in round him

"Well," said Hawke, and there was a sharp tenseness in his voice "Where is it?"

From Sandes there came a sort of dreadful strangled cry Then as if reckless from fury and disappointment, he swore a lurid oath

"It's not there!" he cried aloud "It's gone! Some one 'as taken it!"

"Silence, you fool," Hawke hissed. He snatched the torch from Sandes and gazed into the vase. "You — liar!" he went on, and his voice, low as it was, cut like a knife. "This soil where you haven't disturbed it hasn't been moved for months! It's grown green scum. See, you others."

The other two men looked and cursed in low tones.

"Now see, you," Hawke went on, still hissing venomously like an angry snake. "You tell us where that stuff is inside ten seconds or this knife goes into your heart. You thought you'd do us out of our shares so that you could have it all when you got out of quod, and now you think you can put us off with fairy tales! I suspected this and that's why I brought these others." He raised his hand, which held a long pointed knife. "You won't escape, Sandes, and we'll all be responsible for your death. Now where is it? I'll give you till I count ten. Hold him, you others."

French wondered if he should take a hand. He believed Hawke was in earnest and he couldn't stand there and see murder done. Then he realised that Hawke would delay in the hope of learning the truth. And as he himself was quite as anxious as the others to hear what Sandes had to say, he also waited, his heart thumping from the suspense.

"One!" Hawke paused, then went on slowly. "Two! Three! Hold his mouth, will you!" French saw the little knot bunch together. Hawke raised the knife and began to press the point against the little man's breast. Suddenly the prisoner began to struggle violently. Hawke withdrew the knife.

"We're not bluffing," he whispered in that voice of steel. "If we don't get our shares this knife goes into your heart. I've counted to three." Again he paused. "Four!" And again "Five!" And again "Six!" Then came another voice. "Try him with the knife again, guv'nor," said the man who had not previously spoken.

"No, no, no!" came in a muffled scream. "I've told you the truth, I swear I 'ave. I 'id it there." He swore by all his gods. "If you kill me I can't tell you no more!"

"Hold him again," said Hawke inexorably, once more raising the knife.

French felt he couldn't stand this any more. He believed Sandes. He recognised the ring of truth as well as of desperate despairing fear in his voice. The man had, French felt sure, hidden the stuff there in that vase and—some one else had got it and was sitting tight. Perhaps a gardener or one of the servants. He began edging round the wall to the steps.

He had formed his men for the assault and they were about to

rush up the steps to take the others by surprise, when there came a terrible scream from above, followed by Hawke's savage voice "That's torn it, you — fools! Why couldn't you hold his mouth as I said? We may run for it now! Bring him along!"

Dispensing with any further attempt to preserve silence, the three men dashed across the loggia, dragging the fourth with them. So headlong was their flight that they did not see the waiting constables till they were at the steps. Then arose a terrible outcry "The cops!" yelled Hawke with a furious oath "Leave Sandes and get away over the balustrade!" As he shouted he doubled back, fumbling desperately in his pocket. French, flashing out his torch, rushed forward, followed by his men. As Hawke drew a pistol French closed with him.

Now the loggia became a nightmare of whirling bodies, of groans and curses, of thuds and—a couple of times—of pistol-shots. The torches had been knocked down and had gone out and no one could see what he was doing. Every one clung to whoever he could feel, but he had no idea who he was holding. Three of the policemen found themselves struggling together, and it was a couple of minutes before they discovered it and went to their companions' help. Then French touched a torch with his foot and managed to pick it up. With the light the end came quickly. There were eight police to three criminals, for Sandes was too much overcome to take any part in the *mêlée*.

"Take them along to the cars, Carter," French panted.

Presently, handcuffed, the four men were led off, while French remained behind to assuage the fears of those in the Manor.

Next morning French walked up to have a look at the scene of the combat. With Sergeant Carter he stood in the centre of the loggia and looked around.

"Do you see anything interesting?" he said presently, and when the sergeant had failed to give the required reaction, he went on "That corner where Sandes said he hid the stuff gets the east wind. You remember he said he chose it because for that reason no one sat there. And yet I notice that the plants there are finer and more healthy than those on the sheltered south side. Does that suggest anything to you? Ah, it does, does it? Then let us see."

He walked over to the poorest of the plants, which looked indeed as if it had been scorched by wind. In the vase he began to dig with his penknife.

"Ah," he said in accents of deepest satisfaction "What have we here? I think this is Sandes's little lot!"

It was a lucky deduction. In a parcel were the whole of the jewels, and an inquiry from the head gardener showed that only

the week before he had changed the vases round, so as to get the poorer shrubs out of the east wind

At the trial only Hawke and Taylor could be proved guilty of murder, the sending of the telegram not being held to cover compliance with all that had been done at Greenbridge. The first two were executed and the others spent many years in retreat from their normal haunts. In gratitude for French's work Lady Ormsby-Keats contributed £500 to police charities, so for a two-fold reason French felt his efforts had not been wasted

Dr. Thorndyke

THE SEAL OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

By

R AUSTIN FREEMAN

"I SUPPOSE, Thorndyke," said I, "footprints yield quite a lot of information if you think about them enough?"

"The question was called forth by the circumstance of my friend halting and stooping to examine the little pit made in the loamy soil of the path by the walking-stick of some unknown wayfarer. Ever since we had entered this path—to which we had been directed by the station-master of Pinwell Junction as a short cut to our destination—I had noticed my friend scanning its surface, marked with numerous footprints, as if he were mentally reconstructing the personalities of the various travellers who had trodden it before us. This I know to be a habit of his, almost unconsciously pursued, and the present conditions certainly favoured it, for here, as the path traversed a small wood, the slightly moist, plastic surface took impressions with the sharpness of moulding wax.

"Yes," he answered, "but you must do more than think. You need to train your eyes to observe inconspicuous characteristics."

"Such as these, for instance," said I, with a grin, pointing to a blatant print of a Cox's "Invicta" rubber sole with its prancing-horse trade-mark.

Thorndyke smiled. "A man," said he, "who wears a sole like that is a mere advertising agent. He who runs may read those characteristics, but as there are thousands of persons wearing 'Invicta' soles, the observation merely identifies the wearer as a member of a large genus. It has to be carried a good deal farther to identify him as an individual, otherwise, a standardised sole is apt to be rather misleading than helpful. Its gross distinctiveness tends to divert the novice's attention from the more specific characteristics which he would seek in a plain footprint like that of this man's companion."

"Why companion?" I asked. "The two men were walking the same way, but what evidence is there that they were companions?"

"A good deal, if you follow the series of tracks, as I have been doing. In the first place, there is the stride. Both men were rather tall, as shown by the size of their feet, but both have a distinctly

short stride Now the leather-soled man's short stride is accounted for by the way in which he put down his stick He held it stiffly, leaning upon it to some extent and helping himself with it There is one impression of the stick to every two paces, every impression of his left foot has a stick impression opposite to it The suggestion is that he was old, weak or infirm But the rubber-soled man walked with his stick in the ordinary way—one stick impression to every four paces His abnormally short stride is not to be accounted for excepting by the assumption that he stepped short to keep pace with the other man

"Then the two sets of footprints are usually separate Neither man has trodden nor set his stick on the other man's tracks, excepting in those places where the path is too narrow for them to walk abreast, and there, in the one case I noticed the rubber soles treading on the prints of the leather soles, whereas at this spot the prints of the leather soles are imposed on those of the rubber soles That, of course, is conclusive evidence that the two men were here at the same time "

"Yes," I agreed, "that settles the question without troubling about the stride But after all, Thorndyke, this is a matter of reasoning, as I said, of thinking about the footprints and their meaning No special acuteness of observation or training of vision comes into it The mere facts are obvious enough, it is their interpretation that yields the knowledge "

"That is true so far," said he, "but we haven't exhausted our material Look carefully at the impressions of the two sticks and tell me if you see anything remarkable in either of them "

I stooped and examined the little pits that the two sticks had made in the path, and, to tell the truth, found them extremely unilluminating

"They seem very much alike," I said "The rubber-soled man's stick is rather larger than the other and the leather-soled man's stick has made deeper holes—probably because it was smaller and he was leaning on it more heavily "

Thorndyke shook his head "You've missed the point, Anstey, and you've missed it because you have failed to observe the visible facts It is quite a neat point, too, and might in certain circumstances be a very important one "

"Indeed," said I "What is the point?"

"That," said he, "I shall leave you to infer from the visible facts which are these first, the impressions of the smaller stick are on the right-hand side of the man who made them, and second, that each impression is shallowest towards the front and the right-hand side "

I examined the impressions carefully and verified Thorndyke's statement

"Well," I said, "what about it? What does it prove?"

Thorndyke smiled in his exasperating fashion "The proof," said he, "is arrived at by reasoning from the facts. My learned friend has the facts. If he will consider them, the conclusion will emerge."

"But," said I, "I don't see your drift. The impression is shallower on one side, I suppose, because the ferrule of the stick was worn away on that side. But I repeat, what about it? Do you expect me to infer why the fool that it belonged to wore his stick away all at one side?"

"Now, don't get irritable, Anstey," said he. "Preserve a philosophic calm. I assure you that this is quite an interesting problem."

"So it may be," I replied. "But I'm hanged if I can imagine why he wore his stick down in that way. However, it doesn't really matter. It isn't my stick—and by Jingo, here is old Brodrigg—caught us in the act of wasting our time on academic chin-wags and delaying his business. The debate is adjourned."

Our discussion had brought us to the opening of the wood, which now framed the figure of the solicitor. As he caught sight of us, he hurried forward, holding out his hand.

"Good men and true!" he exclaimed. "I thought you would probably come this way, and it is very good of you to have come at all, especially as it is a mere formality."

"What is?" asked Thorndyke. "Your telegram spoke of an 'alleged suicide.' I take it that there is some ground for inquiry?"

"I don't know that there is," replied Brodrigg. "But the deceased was insured for three thousand pounds, which will be lost to the estate if the suicide is confirmed. So I put it to my fellow-executor that it was worth an expert's fee to make sure whether or not things are what they seem. A verdict of death by misadventure will save us three thousand pounds. *Verbum sap*." As he concluded, the old lawyer winked with exaggerated cunning and stuck his elbow into my ribs.

Thorndyke ignored the facetious suggestion of bribery and corruption and inquired dryly

"What are the circumstances of the case?"

"I'd better give you a sketch of them before we get to the house," replied Brodrigg. "The dead man is Martin Rowlands, the brother of my neighbour in New Square, Tom Rowlands. Poor old Tom found the telegram waiting when he got to his office this morning and immediately rushed into my office with it and begged me to come down here with him. So I came. Couldn't refuse a brother solicitor. He's waiting at the house now."

"The circumstances are these. Last evening, when he had finished dinner, Rowlands went out for a walk. That is his usual habit in

the summer months—it is light until nearly half-past nine nowadays Well, that is the last time he was seen alive by the servants No one saw him come in But there was nothing unusual in that, for he had a private entrance to the annexe in which his library, museum and workrooms were situated, and when he returned from his walk, he usually entered the house that way and went straight to his study or workroom and spent the evening there So the servants very seldom saw him after dinner

“Last night he evidently followed his usual custom But, this morning, when the housemaid went to his bedroom with his morning tea, she was astonished to find the room empty and the bed undisturbed She at once reported to the housekeeper, and the pair made their way to the annexe There they found the study door locked, and as there was no answer after repeated knockings, they went out into the grounds to reconnoitre The study window was closed and fastened, but the workroom window was unbolted, so that they were able to open it from outside Then the housemaid climbed in and went to the side door, which she opened and admitted the housekeeper The two went to the workroom, and as the door which communicated with the study was open, they were able to enter the latter, and there they found Martin Rowlands, sitting in an arm-chair by the table, stone-dead, cold and stiff On the table were a whisky decanter, a siphon of soda-water, a box of cigars, an ash-bowl with the stump of a cigar in it, and a bottle of photographic tabloids of cyanide of potassium

“The housekeeper immediately sent off for a doctor and dispatched a telegram to Tom Rowlands at his office The doctor arrived about nine and decided that the deceased had been dead about twelve hours The cause of death was apparently cyanide poisoning, but, of course, that will be ascertained or disproved by the post-mortem Those are all the known facts at present The doctor helped the servants to place the body on a sofa, but as it is as stiff as a frozen sheep, they might as well have left it where it was ”

“Have the police been communicated with?” I asked

“No,” replied Brodribb “There were no suspicious circumstances, so far as any of us could see, and I don’t know that I should have felt justified in sending for you—though I always like to have Thorndyke’s opinion in a case of sudden death—if it had not been for the insurance ”

Thorndyke nodded “It looks like a straightforward case of suicide,” said he “As to the state of deceased’s affairs, his brother will be able to give us any necessary information, I suppose?”

“Yes,” replied Brodribb “As a matter of fact, I think Martin has been a bit worried just lately, but Tom will tell you about that This is the place ”

We turned in at a gateway that opened into the grounds of a substantial though unpretentious house, and as we approached the front door, it was opened by a fresh-coloured, white-haired man whom we both knew pretty well in our professional capacities. He greeted us cordially, and though he was evidently deeply shocked by the tragedy, struggled to maintain a calm, business-like manner.

"It is good of you to come down," said he, "but I am afraid we have troubled you rather unnecessarily. Still, Brodrigg thought it best—*ex abundantia cautela*, you know—to have the circumstances reviewed by a competent authority. There is nothing abnormal in the affair excepting its having happened. My poor brother was the sanest of men, I should say, and we are not a suicidal family. I suppose you had better see the body first?"

As Thorndyke assented, he conducted us to the end of the hall and into the annexe, where we entered the study, the door of which was now open, though the key was still in the lock. The table still bore the things that Brodrigg had described, but the chair was empty, and its late occupant lay on a sofa, covered with a large table-cloth. Thorndyke advanced to the sofa and gently drew away the cloth, revealing the body of a man, fully dressed, lying stiffly and awkwardly on its back with the feet raised and the stiffened limbs extended. There was something strangely and horribly artificial in the aspect of the corpse, for, though it was lying down, it had the posture of a seated figure, and thus bore the semblance of a hideously realistic effigy which had been picked up from a chair and laid down. I stood looking at it from a little distance with a layman's distaste for the presence of a dead body, but still regarding it with attention and some curiosity. Presently my glance fell on the soles of the shoes—which were, indeed, exhibited plainly enough—and I noted, as an odd coincidence, that they were "Invicta" rubber soles, like those which we had just been discussing in the wood, that it was even possible that those very footprints had been made by the feet of this grisly lay figure.

"I expect, Thorndyke," Brodrigg said tactfully, "you would rather make your inspection alone. If you should want us, you will find us in the dining-room," and with this he retired, taking Mr Rowlands with him.

As soon as they were gone I drew Thorndyke's attention to the rubber soles.

"It is a queer thing," said I, "but we may have actually been discussing this poor fellow's own footprints."

"As a matter of fact, we were," he replied, pointing to a drawing-pin that had been trodden on and had stuck into one of the rubber heels. "I noticed this at the time, and apparently you did

not, which illustrates what I was saying about the tendency of these very distinctive types of sole to distract attention from those individual peculiarities which are the ones that really matter."

"Then," said I, "if they were his footprints, the man with the remarkable stick was with him. I wonder who he was. Some neighbour who was walking home from the station with him, I expect."

"Probably," said Thorndyke, "and as the prints were quite recent—they might even have been made last night—that person may be wanted as a witness at the inquest as the last person who saw deceased alive. That depends on the time the prints were made."

He walked back to the sofa and inspected the corpse very methodically, giving close attention to the mouth and hands. Then he made a general inspection of the room, examined the objects on the table and the floor under it, strayed into the adjoining workshop, where he peered into the deep laboratory sink, took an empty tumbler from a shelf, held it up to the light and inspected the shelf—where a damp ring showed that the tumbler had been put there to drain—and from the workshop wandered into a little lobby and from thence out at the side door, down the flagged path to the side gate and back again.

"It is all very negative," he remarked discontentedly, as we returned to the study, "except that bottle of tabloids, which is pretty positive evidence of premeditation. That looks like a fresh box of cigars. Two missing. One stump in the ash-tray and more ash than one cigar would account for. However, let us go into the dining-room and hear what Rowlands has to tell us," and with this he walked out and crossed the hall and I followed him.

As we entered the dining-room, the two men looked at us and Brodribb asked:

"Well, what is the verdict?"

"At present," Thorndyke replied, "it is an open verdict. Nothing has come to light that disagrees with the obvious appearances. But I should like to hear more of the antecedents of the tragedy. You were saying that deceased had been somewhat worried lately. What does that amount to?"

"It amounts to nothing," said Rowlands, "at least, I should have thought so, in the case of a level-headed man like my brother. Still as it is all there is, so far as I know, to account for what has happened, I had better give you the story. It seems trivial enough."

"Some short time ago, a Major Cohen, who had just come home from Mesopotamia, sold to a dealer named Lyon a small gold cylinder seal that he had picked up in the neighbourhood of Baghdad. The Lord knows how he came by it, but he had it and he showed it to Lyon, who bought it of him for a matter of twenty

pounds Cohen, of course, knew nothing about the thing, and Lyon didn't know much more, for although he is a dealer, he is no expert. But he is a very clever faker—or rather, I should say, restorer, for he does quite a legitimate trade. He was a jeweller and watch-jobber originally, a most ingenious workman, and his line is to buy up damaged antiques and restore them. Then he sells them to minor collectors, though quite honestly as restorations, so I oughtn't to call him a faker. But, as I said, he has no real knowledge of antiques, and all he saw in Cohen's seal was a gold cylinder seal, apparently ancient and genuine, and on that he bought it for about twice the value of the gold and thought no more about it.

“About a fortnight later, my brother Martin went to his shop in Petty France, Westminster, to get some repairs done, and Lyon, knowing that my brother was a collector of Babylonian antiquities, showed him the seal, and Martin, seeing at once that it was genuine and a thing of some interest and value, bought it straightway for forty pounds without examining it at all minutely, as it was obviously worth that much in any case. But when he got home and took a rolled impression of it on moulding wax, he made a most astonishing discovery. The impression showed a mass of minute cuneiform characters, and on deciphering these he learned with amazement and delight that this was none other than the seal of Nebuchadnezzar.

“Hardly able to believe in his good fortune, he hurried off to the British Museum and showed his treasure to the Keeper of the Babylonian Antiquities, who fully confirmed the identity of the seal and was naturally eager to acquire it for the Museum. Of course, Martin wouldn't sell it, but he allowed the keeper to take a record of its weight and measurements and to make an impression on clay to exhibit in the case of seal-rollings.

“Meanwhile, it seems that Cohen, before disposing of the seal, had amused himself by making a number of rolled impressions on clay. Some of these he took to Lyon, who bought them for a few shillings and put one of them in his shop window as a curio. There it was seen and recognised by an American Assyriologist, who went in and bought it and then began to question Lyon closely as to whence he had obtained it. The dealer made no secret of the matter, but gave Cohen's name and address, saying nothing, however, about the seal. In fact, he was unaware of the connection between the seal and the rollings, as Cohen had sold him the latter as genuine clay tablets which he said he had found in Mesopotamia. But, of course, the expert saw that it was a recent rolling and that some one must have the seal.

“Accordingly, off he went to Cohen and questioned him closely, whereupon Cohen began to smell a rat. He admitted that

he had had the seal, but refused to say what had become of it until the expert told him what it was and how much it was worth. This the expert did, very reluctantly and in strict confidence, and when Cohen learned that it was the seal of Nebuchadnezzar and that it was worth anything up to ten thousand pounds, he nearly fainted, and then he and the expert together hustled off to Lyon's shop.

"But now Lyon smelt a rat, too. He refused absolutely to disclose the whereabouts of the seal, and having, by now, guessed that the seal-rollings were those of the seal, he took one of them to the British Museum, and then, of course, the murder was out. And further to complicate the matter, the Assyriologist, Professor Bateman, seems to have talked freely to his American friends at his hotel, with the result that Lyon's shop was besieged by wealthy American collectors, all roaring for the seal and all perfectly regardless of cost. Finally, as they could get no change out of Lyon, they went to the British Museum, where they learned that my brother had the seal and got his address—or rather mine, for he had, fortunately for himself, given my office as his address. Then they proceeded to bombard him with letters, as also did Cohen and Lyon.

"It was an uncomfortable situation. Cohen was like a madman. He swore that Lyon had swindled him and he demanded to have the seal returned or the proper price paid. Lyon, for his part, went about like a roaring lion of Judah, making a similar demand, and the millionaire collectors offered wild sums for the seal. Poor Martin was very much worried about it. He was particularly unhappy about Cohen, who had actually found the seal and who was a disabled soldier—he had been wounded in both legs and was permanently lame. As to Lyon, he had no grievance, for he was a dealer and it was his business to know the value of his own stock, but still it was hard luck even on him. And then there were the collectors, pestering him daily with entreaties and extravagant offers. It was very worrying for him. They would probably have come down here to see him, but he kept his private address a close secret.

"I don't know what he meant to do about it. What he did was to arrange with me for the loan of my private office and have a field day, interviewing the whole lot of them—Cohen, Lyon, the Professor and the assorted millionaires. That was three days ago, and the whole boiling of them turned up, and by the same token, one of them was the kind of pestilent fools that walks off with the wrong hat or umbrella."

"Did he walk off with your hat?" asked Brodribb.

"No, but he took my stick, a nice old stick that belonged to my father."

"What sort of stick did he leave in its place?" Thorndyke asked

"Well," replied Rowlands, "I must admit that there was some excuse, for the stick that he left was almost a facsimile of my own. I don't think I should have noticed it but for the feel. When I began to walk with it, I was aware of something unusual in the feel of it."

"Perhaps it was not quite the same length as yours," Thorndyke suggested

"No, it wasn't that," said Rowlands. "The length was all right, but there was some more subtle difference. Possibly, as I am left-handed and carry my stick on the left side, it may in the course of years have acquired a left-handed bias, if such a thing is possible. I'll go and get the stick for you to see."

He went out of the room and returned in a few moments with an old-fashioned Malacca cane the ivory handle of which was secured by a broad silver band. Thorndyke took it from him and looked it over with a degree of interest and attention that rather surprised me. For the loss of Rowlands' stick was a trivial incident and no concern of ours. Nevertheless, my colleague inspected it most methodically, handle, silver band and ferrule, especially the ferrule, which he examined as if it were quite a rare and curious object.

"You needn't worry about your stick, Tom," said Brodribb with a mischievous smile. "Thorndyke will get it back if you ask him nicely."

"It oughtn't to be very difficult," said Thorndyke, handing back the stick, "if you have a list of the visitors who called that day."

"Their names will be in the appointments book," said Rowlands. "I must look them up. Some of them I remember—Cohen, Lyon, Bateman and two or three of the collectors. But to return to our history. I don't know what passed at the interviews or what Martin intended to do, but I have no doubt he made some notes on the subject. I must search for them, for, of course, we shall have to dispose of the seal."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "where is the seal?"

"Why, it is here in the safe," replied Rowlands; "and it oughtn't to be. It should have been taken to the bank."

"I suppose there is no doubt that it is in the safe?" said Thorndyke.

"No," replied Rowlands, "at least——" He stood up suddenly. "I haven't seen it," he said. "Perhaps we had better make sure."

He led the way quickly to the study, where he halted and stood looking at the shrouded corpse.

"The key will be in his pocket," he said, almost in a whisper.

Then, slowly and reluctantly, he approached the sofa, and gently drawing away the cover from the body, began to search the dead man's pockets

"Here it is," he said at length, producing a bunch of keys and separating one, which he apparently knew. He crossed to the safe, and inserting the key, threw open the door

"Ha!" he exclaimed with evident relief, "it is all right. Your question gave me quite a start. Is it necessary to open the packet?"

He held out a little sealed parcel on which was written "The Seal of Nebuchadnezzar," and looked inquiringly at Thorndyke

"You spoke of making sure," the latter replied with a faint smile

"Yes, I suppose it would be best," said Rowlands, and with that, he cut the thread with which it was fastened, broke the seal and opened the package, disclosing a small cardboard box in which lay a cylindrical object rolled up in a slip of paper

Rowlands picked it out, and removing the paper, displayed a little cylinder of gold pitted all over with minute cuneiform characters. It was about an inch and a quarter long by half an inch thick and had a hole bored through its axis from end to end

"This paper, I see," said Rowlands, "contains a copy of the keeper's description of the seal—its weight, dimensions and so on. We may as well take care of that."

He handed the little cylinder to Thorndyke, who held it delicately in his fingers and looked at it with a gravely reflective air. Indeed, small as it was, there was something very impressive in its appearance and in the thought that it had been handled by and probably worn on the person of the great king in those remote, almost mythical times, so familiar and yet so immeasurably far away. So I reflected as I watched Thorndyke inspecting the venerable little object in his queer, exact, scientific way, examining the minute characters through his lens, scrutinising the ends and even peering through the central hole

"I notice," he said, glancing at the paper which Rowlands held, "that the keeper has given only one transverse diameter, apparently assuming that it is a true cylinder. But it isn't. The diameter varies. It is not quite circular in section and the sides are not perfectly parallel."

He produced his pocket calliper-gauge, and, closing the jaws on the cylinder, took the reading of the vernier. Then he turned the cylinder, on which the gauge became visibly out of contact

"There is a difference of nearly two millimetres," he said when he had again closed the gauge and taken the reading

"Ah, Thorndyke," said Brodribb, "that keeper hadn't got your mathematically exact eye, and, in fact, the precise measurements don't seem to matter much."

"On the other hand," retorted Thorndyke, "inexact measurements are of no use at all"

When we had all handled and inspected the seal, Rowlands repacked it and returned it to the safe, and we went back to the dining-room

"Well, Thorndyke," said Brodribb, "how does the insurance question stand? What is our position?"

"I think," Thorndyke replied, "that we will leave the question open until the inquest has been held. You must insist on an expert analysis, and perhaps that may throw fresh light on the matter. And now we must be off to the station. I expect you have plenty to do."

"We have," said Brodribb, "so I won't offer to walk with you. You know the way."

Politely but firmly declining Rowlands' offer of material hospitality, Thorndyke took up his research-case, and having shaken hands with our hosts, we followed them to the door and took our departure.

"Not a very satisfactory case," I remarked as we set forth along the road, "but you can't make a bull's-eye every time."

"No," he agreed, "you can only observe and note the facts. Which reminds me that we have some data to collect in the wood. I shall take casts of those footprints in case they should turn out to be of importance. It is always a useful precaution, seeing that footprints are fugitive."

It seemed to me an excessive precaution, but I made no comment, and when we arrived at the footpath through the wood and he had selected the sharpest footprints, I watched him take out from his case the plaster-tin, water-bottle, spoon and little rubber bowl, and wondered what was in his mind. The "Invicta" footprints were obviously those of the dead man. But what if they were? And of what use were the casts of the other man's feet? The man was unknown, and as far as I could see, there was nothing suspicious in his presence here. But when Thorndyke had poured the liquid plaster into the two pairs of footprints, he went on to a still more incomprehensible proceeding. Mixing some fresh plaster, he filled up with it two adjoining impressions of the strange man's stick. Then, taking a reel of thread from the case, he cut off about two yards, and stretching it taut, held it exactly across the middle of the two holes, until the plaster set and fixed it in position. After waiting for the plaster to set hard, and having, meanwhile, taken up and packed the casts of the footprints, he gently raised, first the one and then the other cast, each of which was a snowy-white facsimile of the tip of the stick which had made the impression, the two casts being joined by a length of thread which gave the exact distance apart of the

two impressions "I suppose," said I, as he made a pencil mark on one of the casts, "the thread is to show the length of the stride?"

"No," he answered "It is to show the exact direction in which the man was walking and to mark the front and back of the stick "

I could make nothing of this It was highly ingenious, but what on earth was the use of it? What could it possibly prove?

I put a few tentative questions, but could get no explanation beyond the obvious truth that it was of no use to postpone the collection of evidence until after the event What event he was referring to, I did not gather, nor was I any further enlightened when, on arriving at Victoria, he hailed a taxicab and directed the driver to set him down at Scotland Yard

"You had better not wait," he said, as he got out "I have some business to talk over with Miller or the Assistant Commissioner and may be detained some time But I shall be at home all the evening "

Taking this as an invitation to drop in at his chambers, I did so after dinner and made another ineffectual attempt to pump him

"I am sorry to be so evasive," said he, "but this case is so extremely speculative that I cannot come to any definite conclusion until I have more data I may have been theorising in the air But I am going forth to-morrow morning at half-past eight in the hope of putting some of my inferences to the test If my learned friend would care to lend his distinguished support to the expedition, his society would be appreciated But it will be a case of passive observation and quite possibly nothing will happen "

"Well, I will come and look on," said I "Passive observation is my speciality ", and with this I took my departure, rather more mystified than ever

Punctually, next morning at half-past eight, I arrived at the entry of Thorndyke's chambers A taxicab was already waiting at the kerb, and, as I stepped on the threshold, my colleague appeared on the stairs Together we entered the cab which at once moved off, and proceeding down Middle Temple Lane to the Embankment, headed westward Our first stopping-place was New Scotland Yard, but there Thorndyke remained only a minute or two Our further progress was in the direction of Westminster, and in a few minutes we drew up at the corner of Petty France, where we alighted and paid off the taxi Sauntering slowly westward and passing a large, covered car that was drawn up by the pavement, we presently encountered no less a person than Mr Superintendent Miller, dressed in the height of fashion and smoking a cigar The meeting was not, apparently, unexpected, for Miller began, without preamble

"It's all right, so far, doctor, unless we are too late. It will be an awful suck-in if we are. Two plain-clothes men have been here ever since you called yesterday evening, and nothing has happened yet.

"You mustn't treat it as a certainty, Miller," said Thorndyke. "We are only acting on reasonable probabilities. But it may be a false shot, after all."

Miller smiled indulgently. "I know, sir. I've heard you say that sort of thing before. At any rate, he's there at present, I saw him just now through the shop window—and, by gum! here he is!"

I followed the superintendent's glance and saw a tallish, elderly man advancing on the opposite side of the street. He walked stiffly with the aid of a stick and with a pronounced stoop as if suffering from some weakness of the back, and he carried in his free hand a small wooden case suspended by a rug-strap. But what instantly attracted my attention was his walking-stick, which appeared, so far as I could remember, to be an exact replica of the one that Tom Rowlands had shown us.

We continued to walk westward, allowing Mr. Lyon—as I assumed him to be—to pass us. Then we turned back and followed at a little distance; and I noticed that two tall, military-looking men whom we had met kept close behind us. At the corner of Petty France, Mr. Lyon hailed a taxicab, and Miller quickened his pace and bore down on the big covered car.

"Jump in," he said, opening the door as Lyon entered the cab. "We mustn't lose sight of him," and with this he fairly shoved Thorndyke and me into the car, and having spoken a word to the driver, stepped in himself and was followed by the two plain-clothes men. The car started forward, and having made a spurt which brought it within a few yards of the taxi, slowed down to the pace of the latter and followed it through the increasing traffic until we turned into Whitehall, where our driver allowed the taxi to draw ahead somewhat. At Charing Cross, however, he closed up and kept immediately behind our quarry in the dense traffic of the Strand; and when it turned to cross opposite the Acropolis Hotel, we still followed and swept past it in the hotel courtyard so that we reached the main entrance first. By the time that Mr. Lyon had paid his fare we had already entered and were waiting in the hall of the hotel.

As he followed us in, he paused and looked about him until his glance fell on a stoutish, clean-shaved man who was sitting in a wicker-chair, who, on catching his eye, rose and advanced towards him. At this moment Superintendent Miller touched him on the shoulder, causing him to spin round with an expression of very distinct alarm.

"Mr Maurice Lyon, I think," said Miller, "I am a detective officer." He paused and looked hard at the dealer, who had turned deathly pale. Then he continued, "You are carrying a walking-stick which I believe is not your property."

Lyon gave a gasp of relief. "You are quite right," said he. "But I don't know whose property it is. If you do, I shall be pleased to return it in exchange for my own, which I left by mistake."

He held it out in an irresolute fashion, and Miller took it from him and handed it to Thorndyke.

"Is that the stick?" he asked.

Thorndyke looked the stick over quickly, and then, inverting it, made a minute examination of the ferrule, finishing up by taking its dimensions in two diameters and comparing the results with some written notes.

Mr Lyon fidgeted impatiently. "There's no need for all this fuss," said he. "I have told you that the stick is not mine."

"Quite so," said Miller, "but we must have a few words privately about that stick."

Here he turned to an hotel official, who had just arrived under the guidance of one of the plain-clothes men, and who suggested rather anxiously that our business would be better transacted in a private room at the back of the building than in the public hall. He was just moving off to show us the way when the clean-shaved stranger edged up to Lyon and extended his hand towards the wooden case.

"Shall I take this?" he asked suavely.

"Not just now, sir," said Miller, firmly fending him off. "Mr Lyon will talk to you presently."

"But that case is my property," the other objected truculently, "and who are you, anyway?"

"I am a police officer," replied Miller. "But if that is your property, you had better come with us and keep an eye on it."

I have never seen a man look more uncomfortable than did the owner of that case—with the exception of Mr Lyon, whose complexion had once more taken on a tallowy whiteness. But as the manager led the way to the back of the hall the two men followed silently, shepherded by the superintendent and the rest of our party, until we reached a small, marble-floored lobby or ante-room, when our conductor shut us in and retired.

"Now," said Miller, "I want to know what is in that case."

"I can tell you," said the stranger. "It is a piece of sculpture, and it belongs to me."

Miller nodded. "Let us have a look at it," said he.

There being no table, Lyon sat down on a chair, and resting the case on his knees, unfastened the straps with trembling fingers, on

which a drop of sweat fell now and again from his forehead. When the case was free, he opened the lid and displayed the head of a small plaster bust, a miniature copy of Donatello's "St Cecilia," the shoulders of which were wedged in with balls of paper. These Lyon picked out clumsily, and when he had removed the last of them, he lifted out the bust with infinite care and held it out for Miller's inspection. The officer took it from him tenderly—after an eager glance into the empty case—and holding it with both hands, looked at it rather blankly.

"Feels rather damp," he remarked with a somewhat nonplussed air, and then he cast an obviously inquiring glance at Thorndyke, who took the bust from him, and holding it poised in the palm of his hand, appeared to be estimating its weight. Glancing past him at Lyon, I noticed with astonishment that the dealer was watching him with a ghastly stare of manifest terror, while the stranger was hardly less disturbed.

"For God's sake, man, be careful!" the latter exclaimed, starting forward. "You'll drop it!"

The prediction was hardly uttered before it was verified. Drop it he did, and in a perfectly deliberate purposeful manner, so that the bust fell on its back on the marble floor and was instantly shattered into a hundred fragments. It was an amazing affair. But what followed was still more amazing. For, as the snowy fragments scattered to right and left, from one of them a little yellow metal cylinder detached itself and rolled slowly along the floor. The stranger darted forward and stooped to seize it, but Miller stooped, too, and I judged that the superintendent's cranium was the harder, for he rose, rubbing his head with one hand and with the other holding out the cylinder to Thorndyke.

"Can you tell what this is, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "It is the seal of Nebuchadnezzar, and it is the property of the executors of the late Martin Rowlands, who was murdered the night before last."

As he finished speaking, Lyon slithered from his chair and lay upon the floor insensible, while the stranger made a sudden burst for the door, where he was instantly folded in the embrace of a massive plain-clothes man, who held him immovable while his colleague clicked on the handcuffs.

"So," I remarked as we walked home, "your casts of the stick and the footprints were not wanted after all."

"On the contrary," he replied, "they are wanted very much. If the seal should fail to hang Mr. Lyon, the casts will assuredly fit the rope round his neck." (This, by the way, actually happened. The defence that Lyon received the seal from some unknown person was countered by the unexpected production in court of

the casts of Lyon's feet and the stick, which proved that the prisoner had been at Pinwell, and in the company of the deceased at or about the date of the murder, and secured his conviction)

"By the way," said I, "how did you fix this crime on Lyon? It began, I think, with those stick impressions in the wood. What was there peculiar about those impressions?"

"Their peculiarity was that they were the impressions of a stick which apparently did not belong to the person who was carrying it."

"Good Lord, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed, "is that possible? How could an impression on the ground suggest ownership?"

"It is a curious point," he replied, "though essentially simple, which turns on the way in which the ferrule of a stick becomes worn. In a plain, symmetrical stick without a handle, the ferrule wears evenly all round, but in a stick with a crook or other definite handle, which is grasped in a particular way and always put down in the same position, the ferrule becomes worn on one side—the side opposite the handle, or the front of the stick. But the important point is the bevel of wear is not *exactly* opposite the handle. It is slightly to one side, for this reason. A man puts his stick down with the handle fore and aft, but as he steps forward, his hand swings away from his body, rotating the stick slightly outward. Consequently, the wear on the ferrule is slightly inward. That is to say, that in a right-handed man's stick the wear is slightly to the left and in a left-handed man's stick the wear is slightly to the right. But if a right-handed man walks with a left-handed stick, the impression on the ground will show the bevel of wear on the right side—which is the wrong side, and the right-handed rotation will throw it still farther to the right. Now in this case, the impressions showed a shallow part, corresponding to the bevel of wear, on the right side. Therefore it was a left-handed stick. But it was being carried in the right hand. Therefore it—apparently—did not belong to the person who was carrying it."

"Of course, as the person was unknown, the point was merely curious and did not concern us. But see how quickly circumstantial evidence mounts up. When we saw the feet of deceased, we knew that the footprints in the wood were his. Consequently the man with the stick was in his company, and that man at once came into the picture. Then Tom Rowlands told us that he had lost his stick and that he was left-handed, and he showed us the stick that he had got in exchange, and behold! that is a right-handed stick, as I ascertained by examining the ferrule. Here, then, is a left-handed man who has lost a stick and got a right-handed one in exchange, and there, in the wood, was a right-handed man who was carrying a left-handed stick and who was in company with the deceased. It was a striking coincidence. But further, the

suggestion was that this unknown man was one of those who had called at Tom's office, and therefore one who wanted to get possession of the seal. This instantly suggested the question, Did he succeed in getting possession of the seal? We went to the safe, and at once it became obvious that he did."

"The seal in the safe was a forgery, of course?"

"Yes, and, a bad forgery, though skilfully done. It was an electrotype, it was unsymmetrical, it did not agree with the keeper's measurements, and the perforation, though soiled at the ends, was bright in the middle from the boring tool."

"But how did you know that Lyon had made it?"

"I didn't. But he was by far the most probable person. He had a seal-rolling, from which an electro could be made, and he had the great skill that was necessary to turn a flat electro into a cylinder. He was an experienced faker of antiques, and he was a dealer who would have facilities for getting rid of the stolen seal. But it was only a probability, though, as time pressed, we had to act on it. Of course, when we saw him with the stick in his hand, it became virtually a certainty."

"And how did you guess that the seal was in the bust?"

"I had expected to find it enclosed in some plaster object, that being the safest way to hide it and smuggle it out of this country and into the United States. When I saw the bust, it was obvious. It was a hastily-made copy of one of Brucciani's busts. The plaster was damp—Brucciani's bake theirs dry—and had evidently been made only a few hours. So I broke it. If I had been mistaken I could have replaced it for five shillings, but the whole circumstances made it practically a certainty."

"Have you any idea as to how Lyon administered the poison?"

"We can only surmise," he replied. "Probably he took with him some solution of cyanide—if that was what was used—and poured it into Rowlands' whisky when his attention was otherwise occupied. It would be quite easy, and a single gulp of quick-acting poison like that would finish the business in a minute or two. But we are not likely ever to know the details."

The evidence at the inquest showed that Thorndyke was probably right, and his evidence at the trial clenched the case against Lyon. As to the other man—who proved to be an American dealer well known to the New York Customs officials—the case against him broke down from lack of evidence that he was privy either to the murder or the theft. And so ended the case of Nebuchadnezzar's seal—a case that left Mr. Brodribb more than ever convinced that Thorndyke was either gifted with a sixth sense which enabled him to smell out evidence or was in league with some familiar demon who did it for him.

Max Carrados

THE CURIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE TWO LEFT SHOES

By

ERNEST BRAMAH

At the time when the Enderleighs lost their silver the Monkey Burglar was at the height of his fame. The Monkey Burglar, should you by this date have forgotten, was the one who invariably gained access by leaping from a tree on to an upper storey window-sill. So strong was habit that there were said to be cases of the Monkey Burglar going through this performance at houses where the front door stood open, or where a builder's ladder, left in position overnight, was reared against the very point he had gained by the more sensational flight. During the thick of the burglary season that year each number of *Punch* regularly contained one or more jokes about the Monkey, no pantomime was complete without a few references to him, and the burgled invariably tried to claim distinction as authentic victims. In this, the Press, to do it justice, worthily seconded their endeavours.

The Enderleighs lived near Silver Park at that time, in one of the old-fashioned cottages that have long, delightful gardens running down to the river edge. They were a young couple, setting themselves a very moderate standard until the day when Enderleigh's wonderful qualities should be suitably recognised by a partnership. In the meanwhile he was something exceptionally responsible but not so exceptionally rewarded in connection with a firm of estate agents and surveyors. Max Carrados had heard of him favourably from one or two friends and was not unwilling to put business in the young man's way. An opportunity came when the blind criminologist had, as trustee, to deal with an estate down in Warwickshire. He ascertained that Enderleigh was not debarred from doing work on his own account, and gave him a commission to inspect the property and make a general report. Business being slack, there was no difficulty in arranging a few days' leave of absence from the office, and the proposal was gratefully accepted.

On his return—he had conscientiously managed to cover the ground within two days—Enderleigh looked in at The Turrets before proceeding home and found Mr Carrados at leisure

"I thought that I would leave the report with you now," he explained, "in case you cared to glance over it and ask me about any details while it's all fresh in my mind. I wrote up my notes in the train on the way back."

"Good man," smiled Carrados, accepting the docket. "I should have liked you to stay while we discussed the matter, but I am afraid that some one else has a prior lien on your time."

"In what way?"

"A few hours ago Mrs Enderleigh rang me up on the phone, and there is what I might describe as a standing order for you to communicate with her from here at the earliest moment."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Enderleigh in some trepidation. "What's up, I wonder? Nothing wrong that you know of?"

"Nothing at all," replied Carrados with reassuring unconcern. "Your wife was in exceptional spirits, I gathered, but somewhat cryptical. However, there is the means of setting your mind at rest," and he indicated the instrument. "I'll leave you to it."

"Please don't go," Enderleigh seemed to be toying with the moment as if rather unwilling to set his mind at rest. "I was startled for a second, but if my wife herself spoke to you there can't be anything much the matter. The fact is," he confided with a certain shy complacency, "she has been getting rather fanciful of late—not an unusual phase of the situation, I understand."

Mr Carrados murmured his discreet congratulations, and his visitor summed up enough indifference to make the call.

"Holy Moses!" the blind man heard him mutter, and there followed a rapid fusillade of "How?" and "When?" and "What?" and "You don't mean it!" all indicating consternation and surprise, as long as the colloquy lasted.

"Here's a pretty go," announced Mr Enderleigh, hanging up the receiver. "We've been burgled!"

"The deuce!" exclaimed Carrados sympathetically. "I hope your wife isn't much upset?"

"No, I don't think so. In fact, she seems rather set up, because some of our neighbours were robbed in a very commonplace way lately, and she's determined that this must have been the authentic Monkey."

"Much taken?"

"Apparently the silver chest and nothing else. Myra rather fancied that I would call here on my way from something I had said—that's why she rang you up—and she wants me to go straight on. I hope you don't mind?"

"Of course not. I had hoped that you would keep me company for an hour or two, but that's out of the question now. I'll tell you what, though. I will make a bargain with you. Stay another fifteen minutes, in which we can have a snack of some

kind in place of dinner. In the meanwhile I will have a car got out that will land you at your place quicker than any other way you could go, and in return you shall invite me to inspect the degradation."

"That's certainly a bargain from my side of the transaction," replied Enderleigh. "If it isn't putting you out, I'll accept like a shot."

"Not a bit," declared his host with more than polite formality. He moved across to the house telephone and quickly distributed the necessary orders. "I love anything that comes suddenly along. It may be the beginning of—what adventure?"

"Well, as to that, of course there are two sides," said the domesticated Enderleigh. "This is quite sudden enough for me, but I certainly don't love it."

Carrados was as good as his literal word, and fifteen minutes after he had spoken the lean form of his speedy Redshank car glided down the drive into the high road and then stretched out for Silver Park.

"Now that it's come to this, I may as well tell you about our silver," explained Mr. Enderleigh to his companion, on a confidential impulse. "We happen to have rather a lot—more than people in our modest way generally sport, I mean. Myra's father was a fruit-grower and won a lot of cups and plates in his time. I used to be something of a runner and I amassed a few more, and when we got married our friends showered cruets and cake baskets down on us galore. The consequence is that there was a solid half-hundredweight of the metal reposing in a specially made case in the dining-room at Homecroft. Of course it ought to have been kept at the bank, and at first it was, but Myra liked to see an assortment out on the sideboard, so that it got to be a nuisance sending it backwards and forwards. Then I said that if we had it in the house it ought to be kept up in the bedroom for safety, and Myra found that she couldn't even lift the chest and decided that it would be too inconvenient to have it there. What with one thing and another, the confounded silver got to become a bit of a sore point between us—it brought on the first unpleasantness we had. Then, as bad luck would have it, just when I was leaving the other morning to go on this job we must needs get arguing about it again. I suggested that as there would be only two women alone in the house—herself and the servant—it would be safer if I carried the box up and hid it under the bed. Myra—God knows why—retorted that if the silver was the danger-point it wasn't very kind to want to put it just under where she would be. One silly word led to another until I finally went off saying that I wished the damned stuff was at the bottom of the river."

"You seem to have got the next thing to what you asked for then," remarked Carrados "The silver apparently won't trouble you again", but Enderleigh demurred at this cheerful summary and shook his head

"Oh, yes," he replied, "but when you wish a thing like that you don't really mean that you want it to happen"

"You are insured, I suppose?"

"Only partly, I'm afraid, because the value of the silver now exceeds the percentage allowed And of course a lot of the things have associations, although there is nothing of antique value I'm really wondering how Myra will take it when the excitement wears off"

But so far the excitement was on, and she welcomed them radiantly, albeit a shade mystified that Mr. Carrados should have chosen that moment to pay his call It does not say much for the criminal expert's sense of publicity that neither his host nor hostess had the faintest idea of his uncanny reputation To them he was simply the rich blind man who seemed as though he might be useful to Guy

"But isn't it a shame, Mr Carrados?" she cooed, when the first round of wonder and exclamation had been gone through "Sergeant Lapworth declares that it can't possibly be the Monkey Burglar And I was so relying on that to squelch the Higgsses with"

Carrados divined an exchange of private glances, expostulatory from the husband, playfully defiant on her part

"I have met Sergeant Lapworth once or twice and he seemed to know his work," said the visitor "Did he say why it couldn't be?"

"Well, the only way they could have got in was by the side door No fastenings have been forced or windows opened And the Monkey wouldn't ever dream of using a side door"

"But how on earth could they do that?" demanded Enderleigh "I mean without using force Chloe fastens the door at night, doesn't she?"

"I'll show you if you don't mind accompanying me to the nether regions," said the light-hearted girl "Chloe only locks the door, it seems—the bolts are too stiff to work—and Sergeant Lapworth says that these people—he's almost sure he knows the gang—have all manner of ingenious tools There's a sort of pincers that you catch hold of a key with from the other side and turn it quite easily You can see that the lock has been oiled to make it go"

"You found the door unlocked this morning?"

"No—I don't know I never thought of that But I suppose they could just as easily lock it again to cover their tracks, and as it happened it was not until this afternoon that I missed the silver chest Then there are footprints on the bed from the gate to the

side door He found those as well It's most wildly exciting discovering clues, I've been looking for some all the afternoon, but so far without success"

"Come on then," suggested Enderleigh "You have a lamp or candle, I suppose?"

"Yes Do you care to see our private morgue, Mr Carrados—oh, I am sorry I forgot!"

"That's very nice of you—to forget," smiled the blind man "It shows that I'm not so helpless after all Certainly I should like to come, I'm as keen on clues as you are"

The side door was the chief point of interest It opened on to the garden from the scullery The scullery—a dank and forbidding chamber that almost justified its epithet—in turn led into the kitchen, and the kitchen into the hall But there were other ways of getting about, for it was an old house with many passages and on various levels Most of the rooms appeared to have at least two doors "I think that the man who built it must have been fond of French farces," remarked Mr Enderleigh, pointing out this feature

But even at the side door there was very little to see, the Enderleigh burglary being chiefly remarkable for its negative features There was the oiled lock, and the key bore certain recent scratches, and that was all

"If the bolts had been shot this would never have happened," said the master of the house "Perhaps in future——"

"But the bolts can't be stirred, dear," protested Myra "I've tried myself until my poor thumbs are nearly dislocated And every one says that if burglars want to get in they will, even if they have to come down the chimney"

"I think the bolts might move if they were simply oiled," suggested Carrados "The level is all right, you see"

"Chloe," called out Mr Enderleigh—the kitchen door stood open—"is there any oil about?"

A young girl in cap and apron—a girl of quite unusual prettiness—appeared at the door

"Oil, sir?" she repeated faintly, and she continued to look from one to another of them as though something was amiss

"Yes, oil—ordinary oil—the sort you oil with, you know There must be some about somewhere"

"Oh, yes—for the sewing machine," she replied, and disappeared to return with it in a moment

"Now a feather"

The girl's eyes shot to a bucket holding kitchen refuse that stood beneath the sink, then rose to the level again as she continued to stand there

"Feathers in the middle dresser drawer, Chloe," prompted her

mistress tartly "Bless me," she confided to the others, "the girl's going dotty, I believe Over-excitement isn't good for our poor sex"

"Now we want a chair or something for the top bolt," said Enderleigh

"I think I can do it without, if you will allow me," put in Carrados "I fancy that I am just a few inches to the good in that respect"

"But really, Mr Carrados," protested the lady, "won't you get it on your clothes—or something?"

"That is only a matter of carelessness, not vision," replied Carrados He gave the feather a dexterous turn in the neck of the bottle to remove the excess of oil before he withdrew it "Children have the keenest sight, Mrs Enderleigh, and yet look how they drop the jam about!"

"It's quite marvellous," she murmured, watching him apply the oil and then work the action until the bolt slid easily

"Not so much as you might think," he assured her "Frequently you are indebted to other senses when you think you are using your eyes, and they get all the credit Several men have told me that they always close their eyes when they are doing certain delicate adjustments"

"I once knew a lady who always shut her eyes before she fired a gun off," contributed Enderleigh "Yet she was fond of shooting, and often hit things"

"Dogs or keepers?" inquired Myra politely

Certainly the burglary did not seem to have damped any one's spirits Presently they went out to look at the incriminating footprints—"viewing the body," Myra called it—by candlelight until they were tired of striking matches and the friendly darkness put Carrados at liberty to go down on hands and knees and touch the well-marked impressions with his eerily perceptive fingers in his own peculiar way

"What's this—snowing?" Enderleigh had exclaimed as he opened the door to lead the way into the garden A sprinkling of white showed on the bare earth before them

"Goose!" retorted Myra fondly, "it's lime, of course Old Benjamin—he's a sort of local unhandyman, Mr Carrados, whom Guy employs one day a week to sit in the garden and smoke shag—put it on only yesterday He said the soil was too 'thodden' for bulbs it's always too something for Ben"

"It came in useful, all the same," said her husband "You see, the lime being crushed down in the footprints shows that they were made after it was put there That's important"

"Lapworth the Sleuth had already diagnosed that, O Fountain

of Wisdom," mocked his wife. She leaned forward and struck him lightly on the arm. "You're it! Race you to the river, Guy!"

"Ssh!" warned Enderleigh with a nod towards their guest.

"Go, children—run," urged Carrados benignly. "I will follow at a pace more suited to my years."

"Hold up!" cried Myra, limping into a walk before they were fairly off. "I forgot, my feet are as soft as mush to-day. Besides, I oughtn't to now."

"No, of course you oughtn't to," said Guy severely. "And we oughtn't to leave Mr Carrados like that. God knows what sort of a lunatic asylum he'll think he's dropped on."

"Never mind. I got you away. Just one, Guy. And don't worry about him. He said his ears, but he meant his eyes, of course. His ears are sharp enough. That old man wouldn't take any harm if you put him down in the middle of a sawmill."

"Old!" exclaimed Mr Enderleigh indignantly. "Great Scott! What next?"

They walked back to meet the advancing Carrados, and then they all strolled soberly down to the extremity of the garden and stood contemplating the slow, muddy river before they turned back again.

"You take Mr Carrados into the dining-room, Guy," said Myra, hastening on ahead as they neared the house. "I'm going up to change my shoes—these are soaked."

"Yes, my lady, you are pretty high up already, I'm afraid," apostrophised her husband as they followed. "That's the way of it, Mr Carrados. I shall think myself lucky if she isn't down below zero before the night is out."

"I've taken hot water up to the spare room, sir," said Chloe, as they passed her in the hall.

They washed their hands leisurely and went down to the dining-room. The maid had lit the lamp and was replenishing the fire. Still Mrs Enderleigh did not appear. A few minutes passed rather flatly. Enderleigh made a half-hearted show of asking his guest if he was fond of this and that, but Carrados divined his vague uneasiness and soon they both frankly waited.

"Guy," said a queer little voice just outside the door—it had been left somewhat ajar—"do you mind coming here a minute?"

Enderleigh threw a quick, inquiring look across, and the blind man—informed by what sense, who shall say?—nodded mute assent. Then the door closed and Carrados slowly turned his face to the four points of the room.

It was perhaps five minutes later that Enderleigh returned. He came thoughtfully across the room and stood close to his guest's chair.

"It's just as I was afraid," he said, pitching his voice cautiously. "Myra is now at a very minus stage indeed. And a curious thing

—curious and trivial, and yet, I must admit, extraordinary—has happened to upset her. It's mixed up with one or two other matters, and I suppose that this burglary also—although that has nothing to do with it—has helped to put the emotional screw on. If you care to hear I will tell you with pleasure, especially as you have seen how bright she was a few minutes ago, but I don't want to bore you."

"Go on," said Carrados. "Curious and trivial things that are extraordinary have never bored me yet."

"Well, you shall judge. I indicated, over at your place, that we are expecting our little household to be increased in the course of a few months. Not unnaturally, Myra has to pass through a variety of new emotions on the subject, and she also has an unfortunate misgiving. It happened that her father was born club-footed and *his* father was disfigured in the same way. Of course, we tell her that it's all nonsense, but there is undeniably an element of heredity in that sort of thing, and she knows it well enough. Just now she is doubly prone to take notice of any kind of suggestion or premonition that may come along, especially on that one unlucky possibility. You heard her say that she was going up to change her shoes? Well, this is what has happened: she went upstairs, kicked off her wet shoes, and proceeded to pull on another pair. They are shoes that she has worn quite comfortably at intervals for the past few weeks, but now one—the right foot—would not go on. Thinking nothing of it, she picked up a shoe-lift and tried again. Still it refused to accommodate, and then she went to the light and looked more closely. It wasn't likely to fit, Carrados, for the extraordinary thing is that those shoes, which she has worn quite easily and naturally a dozen times in the last few weeks, are both for the left foot!"

There was a rattle of cups and glasses as the attractive maid nearly dropped the tray she was bringing in. Enderleigh looked sharply round, but the girl kept her face averted and quickly went out again.

"There's another who's certainly got the jumps," said her master. "But about those shoes. Of course it's ridiculous, but you see the inference? In each forerunning case it was the right foot that was wrong, and so poor Myra is miraculously endowed with two left shoes at this moment as a sort of admonition that an ordinary right will not be needed. But you don't see anything in it, I expect?"

"On the contrary," replied Carrados slowly, "I see so much in it—so many thousand possibilities, all wrong but one—that I should like to go up into a very large, perfectly bare attic, lit by several twenty thousand candle power arc lamps, and there meditate."

"And the nearest thing I can offer you," said Enderleigh, "is the coal celler. It's roomy as such places go and certainly practically empty now. For the rest——" He found the pleasantry difficult to sustain.

"So," continued the blind man seriously, "we must still proceed on directly material lines. I should very much like to handle the pair of shoes that has caused the trouble. Do you think Mrs. Enderleigh would allow me?"

"Why not?" assented the lady's husband. "I'll go and get them."

He went, and returned almost immediately—but empty-handed.

"She's coming down now. Much better," he whispered in the voice of a conspirator. "Bringing them." And almost at his heels a sobered Myra reappeared.

"I'm a hopeless little rabbit, Mr. Carrados," she apologised. "Please don't say anything nice about it, because I am."

"Rabbit!" ejaculated her natural protector loyally, "rabbit! Why, Mr. Carrados, that—that sylph has the heart of a—a—well, I'm not strong on the faunas, but of whatever is the antithesis of rabbit."

"That would be a ferret, wouldn't it?" asked Myra in her funny way. "What a sad flatterer you are, Guy!"

"Go on," said Guy happily. "So long as you can laugh——"

She waved a reassuring hand to him across the room as she addressed their guest again.

"Of course, I know that he has told you all about it, Mr. Carrados," she said. "Because when I taxed him he began by saying, 'I only just——' Here is the mystery."

It was a pair of pretty bronze shoes, neat yet not fragile, that she put into the blind man's hands. He held them one by one, and as his long, delicately-formed fingers brushed across their surface the two watchers received a curious impression of seeing something read.

"I shouldn't mind—I shouldn't mind the shoes a particle," declared Myra—she felt compelled to speak to break the almost hypnotic quest of those understanding hands—"though, of course, they're no earthly use. But for weeks I've been wearing them all right, and now I know perfectly well that I couldn't. There's something wrong with me somewhere, don't you see?"

"But, dearest," pleaded Guy soothingly, "there's some perfectly simple explanation if only we could see it. Why, only just now you said that your feet were tender. That's probably it. You've got them sore, and so you can't put on the shoe. If they were all right you'd jump into them and not notice that anything was the matter, just as you have been doing up to now."

"Don't talk tommy, Guy!" she exclaimed half wrathfully. "As

if I could possibly put on two left shoes without knowing it, even if I could get them on And yet," she wailed, "I *have* been putting them on—that's the horrible thing about it"

Carrados had apparently finished his scrutiny, for he was listening to this exchange in his usual benign complacency, and as he listened he absently rubbed his nose gently with the polished toe of a shoe

"Set your mind at rest, Mrs Enderleigh," he remarked quietly, as he offered her the other one "There is nothing wrong You have never worn that shoe"

"I have never worn it?"

"Neither you nor anybody else The shoe has not been worn"

"But look at the wear," she persisted, displaying the scarified sole. "Look at this worn lace"

"The lace, yes," he admitted, with unshaken confidence "But not the shoe"

"But how can you possibly know that?"

"In exactly the same way that I could oil the bolt—by using other powers than that of sight"

"Do you mean——" began Enderleigh, but Carrados interrupted him with uplifted hand

"If I may suggest, please don't say anything more about the shoes just yet At this moment Sergeant Lapworth has come to the door and your servant is admitting him Let us hear what he has to say"

Myra and Guy exchanged looks of bewilderment—almost of alarm—and then the girl's face cleared

"Yes," she exclaimed, "I had forgotten to tell you He did say that he would look in again after you got back, Guy"

"If you please, m'm," said Chloe at the door, "there's the detective here again, and he would like to see the master if it's convenient"

"Quite right," replied Myra "Show him in here"

Sergeant Lapworth was a plain-clothes man of the local staff If he had a fault it was that of giving the impression of knowing more than he would tell, a suggestion that resulted in people sometimes finding him less omniscient in the end than they had expected The Enderleighs were rather surprised at the sudden respect that came over him when he recognised their blind visitor

"One or two small matters I thought I'd like to see you about, sir," he said, addressing Mr Enderleigh "Those footprints by the side gate I understand that no one came along that way between the time your gardener put the lime there yesterday and my seeing them this afternoon?"

"That is quite right," agreed Myra "We allow the milkman to come in at the front gate and go to the side door, to save him

carrying his can right round the other way No one else came, I asked Chloe particularly "

"You see the point, sir?" continued the sergeant, directing his voice at Mr Carrados this time "Whoever left those footprints is the man we want to put our hands on We should like him to account for his movements last night at all events Old Ben certainly never made those prints, sir Now, I wonder," the sergeant's voice became softly speculative as he leisurely felt in one or two pockets and finally produced a neat paper template of a boot, "I wonder if this suggests anything to either of you?"

Myra shook her head and passed the paper on to Enderleigh

"It's a man's boot, I suppose," she said "It is broader than a woman's and the heel is twice as large It's much smaller than any of yours, Guy "

"Lord, yes," he agreed "I'm miles beyond that "

"Perhaps," continued Sergeant Lapworth, becoming almost dreamy in his quiet detachment, "perhaps this might help you more if you should ever have seen the original " It was a small fancy button that he mysteriously produced this time from the Aladdin's cave among his garments Myra's spirits went up

"What a splendid clue, Mr Lapworth!" she exclaimed "Where did you find it?"

"I don't want anything said about it just yet," he stipulated "As a matter of fact I picked it up in your scullery this afternoon "

"It is a boot button, I suppose?" questioned Enderleigh "It strikes me as rather dressy "

"It is the top of a pearl boot button undoubtedly, I should say," pronounced the sergeant "One of those metal-shanked things that they wire into the boot nowadays First question is, Does it belong to any one of the house? I dare say you have plenty of pairs of fancy boots and shoes in use or put by, but it isn't a button that you would readily forget "

Myra breathlessly agreed that if she had had boot buttons like that she would never have forgotten it, and added that if Guy had appeared with them she could never have forgiven it—a *sotto-voce* effort that elicited nothing more than an anxious look from her husband

"And how about the young person in the kitchen?" suggested Lapworth

"I know Chloe's boots, and it certainly doesn't come from there," replied Chloe's mistress "However, you had better ask her, to make sure Shall I ring now?"

"Don't trouble," he replied, with a quite spontaneous glance towards the decanters on the table, as he returned the precious relic to its hiding-place "I can have a word with her as I go

out Now as regards the silver Your good lady said that you would be able to make me out a list, sir "

"Of course," assented Enderleigh, "that's got to be done, hasn't it? And then there'll be the insurance people And then a young man introducing himself as 'The Press' I'll tell you what, sergeant, this being burgled isn't such a soft thing after all "

"I don't know, sir It strikes me that you have come off uncommonly easy, seeing as how things were No mess, no breakages, no odds and ends from every room that you can't remember until it's too late to claim Just one big lot taken clean "

"It would be about as much as he could take, anyway," said the owner "I shouldn't like to heft that case far " He casually indicated the group of liquors "What shall it be, sergeant?"

"I'll leave that to you, sir," said the sergeant modestly "Yes, it would be a tidy load I don't know that I ever remember the case being taken before Reckon they had a car somewhere near "

"Anyway, nothing was overlooked," said Myra "There were some tankards out on the sideboard here, and three dozen spoons of various sizes in the drawer, and they went too I put them——"

"You put them what?" prompted her husband, for Myra had stopped as though she had said her say

"I haven't the faintest notion, dear," she replied frankly "To tell the truth I think I was half asleep Put what what?"

"Well, I think I'll be getting on along, sir," said Lapworth, reading in this a pretty obvious hint "As soon as we hear from you——"

"Nonsense," interposed Enderleigh, rather put out at the turn, "have another first," and he refilled the not altogether inflexible sergeant's glass

There was a hesitating knock at the door and Chloe entered with a card

"Please, m'm," said the girl—Mrs Enderleigh happened to be seated nearest to her—"there's a gentleman would like to see the master for a minute "

"'Wich'—'Mr William Wich,'" read Myra "Isn't there a Lady Wich a few houses away?"

"Trefusis—Lady Wich, madam," volunteered Lapworth "There is a Mr William, the son "

"I'd better go out and see what it is," said Enderleigh "Probably only a minute—excuse me, won't you?"

For so short a gap it did not seem worth while discovering a topic of conversation, and so no one broke the minute's silence If they had spoken their thoughts the exchange would have been something after this fashion

"I wonder if Lady Wich ever intends to call—city knight's

widow, I suppose Now will Mr Carrados go when the fat sergeant leaves, or does he expect that we have proper supper?"

"Bit of a card this Mr Willie Wich from what I hear Old party keeps him in pretty tight by all accounts Larky, girls Damn fine stuff this Scotch here Wonder if it'd be all right, if he does give the nod again, for me to——"

"She must stand five feet five—possibly six At that, with the tread she has, she will take a $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 Yes, under any vigorous exercise she might reasonably split a plant $3\frac{1}{2}$ There were certainly two definable personal exudations about the other shoe, and associable with them syringa—that's the girl—and cheiranthus—this one"

The door opened and Enderleigh entered, then standing aside he waited for some one else

"Rather curious," he announced "Mr Wich has come to give us some information about our friend last night, so as we are all here— My wife, Mr Wich, Mr Carrados, Sergeant Lapworth"

"It's really from my mother, you know," said the dapper youth who followed the host in "She's a frightful invalid—heart and all that—so she sent me to tell you We only just heard of what had happened beastly shame——"

"We didn't know that you'd be interested," ventured Myra graciously

"Eh— Oh, I mean rotten luck being burgled like that Well, it seems that last night the mater was having a bad turn and she had to get up and sit at the open window to have air That's how it takes her It seems that from her bedroom window one can see most of your garden—we live a couple of houses along Trefusis, you know—and as she sat there she distinctly saw some one go down your garden towards the river and disappear among the trees She says she wasn't taking much notice of it at the time, because there was no reason why there should be anything wrong in that, and it being dark she didn't see a lot, and she was feeling pretty washed out as well But she did notice that it seemed to be a man carrying something large and heavy, and when she heard of this she thought you'd better know"

"It's most awfully good of Lady Wich to send," gushed Myra, "and of you to come We are just celebrating the event with frugal hospitality Will you drink the toast 'Our Absent Friend' in whisky, port, or coffee, Mr Wich?"

"Eh? Oh, I don't mind The first for choice, thank you"

"The river," mused Lapworth "That's certainly an idea, now we couldn't find any likely motor wheel-tracks down the side road here A boat waiting, you see What time about would this be, sir?"

"Oh, about half-past twelve, she said"

"Ah!" The sergeant continued to regard Mr Wich with an air of distant speculation while at the same time his hand went mechanically to his mysterious pocket "I suppose you didn't by any chance happen to be in the neighbourhood yourself at about that hour, sir?"

The perfect respect of the tone could not wholly disguise a certain significance in the question, and Willie Wich looked up to meet the sergeant's eyes on level terms Enderleigh also found something arresting in the sudden tension that seemed to have involved two of his guests, while Carrados continued to gaze into unseen space with the faint half smile of placid contemplation Myra alone appeared to have no interest in the passage, and her face was turned away, but her lips were tight pressed to hold back a cry of generous warning and her heart was thudding like an engine beat, for in a flash her eyes had followed Lapworth's and in a flash had seen on her spruce guest's extended foot a boot with identical pearl buttons, of which the upper one was missing

The gap between the question and the answer was almost as long as it takes to tell of it, for with their eyes meeting Wich paused to consider his reply as though a thought urged caution

"What do you quite mean by that?" he asked guardedly "You know, of course, that I live in the neighbourhood Do you mean, was I at home?"

"Not exactly, sir," replied the sergeant "You might have been passing this very house on your way home and thought you saw or heard something suspicious here and come nearer to investigate Or you might have had a dog stray into this garden and come in to call it back, or a dozen things What I should like to know is, Did you come into this house or garden last night for any purpose?"

"I did not," said Wich, his face relaxing into something like an amused grin "What is more, sergeant, I have never before been in this house or garden in the course of my long and industrious life"

"That's quite definite, sir," Lapworth admitted "In the circumstances would you mind stating where you were between the hours of eleven last night and two o'clock this morning?"

To those who knew him pretty well young Mr Wich was something of a puzzle, and they complained that you never knew how he would take it and whether the fellow was quite the fool he sometimes seemed

"In the circumstances," sergeant, seems to imply the existence of certain conditions of which I have no knowledge," he now replied "Should I ever find myself in the dock of the Old Bailey, charged with the murder of a constable, or before the Surrey Petty Sessions accused of appropriating Mr Enderleigh's ancestral plate, either of those eventualities would constitute an aggregation of

circumstances that would enforce my acquiescence At present I fail to see any reason why I should render an account of my trivial life and movements "

Sergeant Lapworth took out an irreproachably white pocket handkerchief and wiped his face profusely

"Very good, sir," he remarked with dark significance "Should you have any objection to my comparing this form"—here the sergeant dramatically produced his first exhibit—"with the boots you are now wearing?"

"Not the least," replied the buoyant young man, raising his right foot to facilitate the operation, "though I must protest against the attention thus gratuitously directed to my very unprepossessing footwear Anything to assist the legitimate ends of justice But not," he added severely, "of mere vulgar curiosity"

Without deigning to reply, Sergeant Lapworth went down on one knee and from that position fitted the paper impression against the proffered boot It was at once plain to every one that the two outlines coincided perfectly But an even more significant piece of evidence was to emerge, for as the sergeant performed this office he slyly inserted a nail in the angle of the instep and an appreciable sprinkling of white peppered soil fell down into his hand

"I must call your attention, sir, to the fact that this earth from your boot appears to correspond with the soil of the garden here "

"I say!" exclaimed Mr Wich aghast, "I am sorry, Mrs Enderleigh—bringing stuff like that into your pretty room!" Then with a bright look of toleration, "But I expect you know what servants are!"

"Lastly," said Sergeant Lapworth with admirable composure in spite of a rather flushed complexion, "I shall be glad if you will look at this button which corresponds exactly with those on your boot, where one is missing "

"Thank you," replied young Mr Wich, passing it back again, "it's very good of you to have kept it for me, but it's really no use It isn't a button you sew on, but one of those metal-shanked affairs and the shank is broken "

"Then I understand, sir, that you decline to assist us with any information?"

"Oh, no, you don't, sergeant—not if you understand the common or vernacular tongue, that is," retorted his antagonist "So far, what I have declined is to give an account of my movements on the strength of an old button hypothetically lost at some time from my boot and a little piece of paper traced to measure It may be the law that I have to if any one shows me those I must look that up But you may remember that the only reason for my being here was to bring you information "

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Myra, completely won over by the sus-

pect's ready nonchalance, "we are all sure that Mr Wich is quite all right, Sergeant Lapworth Aren't we, Guy?"

"Mrs Enderleigh," put in Wich, gazing at her with melancholy admiration, "before I go I must unburden my mind, and I'm afraid you may think very poorly of me in consequence I did *not* purloin your silver and I have not the faintest idea who did Good-bye"

"Must you really go?" she asked "Please be sure and thank Lady Wich from me, won't you? And any Thursday"

"If you would be so kind as to help a blind man to his car, Mr Wich," interposed Carrados, and Enderleigh found his own proffered services quietly brushed aside

"You don't say you are!" exclaimed Wich "I never tumbled to it And that's your little jigger waiting then? I'm looking forward to something on four wheels myself, but so far I have to be content with two"

"It's hardly worth while offering you a lift," said Carrados, when they were in the road, "but if you don't mind I should like to walk with you as far as your gate"

"Right-o," said Mr Wich, wondering who this queer customer who had made up to him might be "Lovely night, isn't it? What about your car?"

"It will follow presently, my driver understands I have been trying to think where we have met before Are you by any chance the Wich who made forty-nine for The Rest against Lord's Schools five years ago?"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed his companion, becoming quite boyishly shy at the reference to this exploit "You don't mean to say that you remember that? Were you at Lord's?"

"Yes I am found of the minor fixtures; I can hear more play in them than often comes out in first-class matches We did not speak, but you passed, and I thought I recognised your step again A Winchester fellow was commenting on the game for me You were given run out"

"You must simply be a walking Wisden, sir," said Wich, brimming with admiration And then with a curious intonation in his voice he added, "But why 'given'?"

"I remember some reference to it Were you out?"

"As a matter of fact I was not," he admitted

"I don't think you made any fuss about it—quarrelled with the umpire or grouched about the pavilion?"

"Well, should I be likely? It was cricket"

"Yes And now about this business?"

They had reached the gate of Trefusis, but the young man made no movement towards it, and presently they fell to walking slowly on again

"That isn't so easy Not by a long, long way I was taken by surprise, I must admit, I hadn't a notion that there'd be any trace Of course it would have been simple enough to tell the sergeant how it came about, if that was all"

"You mean the lady in the case, or shall we say the girl in the shoes?"

"Partly, and then there is my mother. She would certainly have a heart attack if she found that William had been taking her neighbour's hand-maiden out to midnight carnivals and other forms of penance"

"Is that quite—cricket?"

"Not absolutely M C C, perhaps, but it isn't to be inferred that I had the inklingest of who she was at first And Chloe really is an awfully pretty girl, you know What has she let out?"

"Nothing at all, so far as I am aware"

"Then how on earth do you come to know of her—and the shoes?"

"Very much, I suppose, in the same way that Sergeant Lapworth has come to know of you and the boot—because the traces are so obvious"

"I must say I think Chloe was a bit of a mutt to walk on the bed and then leave a button somewhere about She might have learned better than that from the pictures surely"

"Chloe naturally had not foreseen that the escapade would coincide with a burglary But I would not be too ready to blame her, my young friend," advised Carrados dryly "The most disastrous blunder of all was made by some one else"

"That's a straight one," said Mr Wich "What did I do?"

"Suppose you tell me about it?" suggested Mr Carrados "Under the seal of confidence"

"I don't mind I was going to see a lawyer first thing to-morrow to find out what I'd better do to circumvent the forces of law and order Perhaps you could advise me?"

"Perhaps I could," admitted Carrados "At all events I will"

"There really isn't very much to tell," said young Mr Wich pensively "I happened to be on the river alone a few months ago when I noticed a dazzling creature watching my feeble efforts from the bank To have a nearer look I landed and asked her if she was not, excuse me, Miss Predergast? She said no, but, how curious, she had been almost sure that I was a certain Mr Johnson This constituting a deputy introduction on established lines I prevailed upon the bright vision to go for a short cruise and even to accept some slight refreshment of a light and portable nature"

"Under the auspices of the gods the idyll proceeded with exemplary propriety to run its normal course So far as I was concerned the chief attraction was the extreme likelihood of detection and

the certainty that every one concerned would impute the very worst motives to my conduct when they did find out

"On our usual 'evening' last week I was indulging the delightful being's passion for a harmless beverage known as Tango Teaser when she espied a handbill announcing a cheap fancy dance at one of the public halls a few miles away and artlessly exclaimed

"'I should love to go to one of those'

"Of course there was only one humanly possible reply to a heart-cry like that, and I gallantly made it

"'And I should love to take you Why not?'

"To this she said that it was absolutely impossible and we fell to making the arrangements She was to creep out quietly by a side door after the others had gone to bed, lock the door after her and bring the key, and meet me at our usual trysting place—a spot a few hundred yards from our respective abodes I would be there with my iron steed, and on the pillion thereof would whirl her into fairyland

"Everything went off as per schedule The only contretemps was that Chloe—have I mentioned that the heroine was Chloe, by the way?—ripped one of her shoes across and thus passed automatically into the retired list I confess that I was surprised at the consternation the mishap occasioned the sweet chit, and then she told me Ashamed at the deficiency of her own pedal outfit she had surreptitiously 'borrowed' a pair belonging to her mistress Detection would now inevitably follow, disgrace, possibly dismissal Sighs, tears—heavens!—reproaches Again I did the insane chivalrous thing and swore to replace the shoe within twelve hours or perish

"The rest is obvious Chloe knew where they had been bought—a shop in Oxford Street—and I was to hie me off at dawn and duplicate them As there would be the business of giving the shoes the necessary 'wear' it would be simpler to keep only one, and this I was to put into a clump of ivy on the garden side wall But when it came to parting a difficulty arose, it was essential for me to have the split shoe as a pattern, I could not allow the fair penitent to walk stocking-footed along the stony road, and it wasn't wise to risk being seen together any nearer our houses The simple way out was for me to lend her one of mine, and this I recovered from the ivy bush when I put the other one in And there, Mr Carrados, you have the whole egg in a nutshell"

"Everything went off all right then?" inquired Carrados maliciously

"Like a clock I obtained the exact thing in the exact size, scrubbed it down to the exact appearance of the other and put in the old lace The superfluous shoe was flung over into an orchard somewhere Isleworth way There was nothing much in all that.

But now you see why it was impossible to satisfy Sergeant Lapworth's inopportune curiosity "

"You may perhaps find it difficult to satisfy one or two other people as well Did Chloe say anything when she let you in just now?"

"Why, yes, it struck me as ungracious at the time The angel looked at me very weirdly and just said 'Idiot!' I thought she must be overwrought "

"I think it very likely I told you that there had been other blunders besides Chloe's What she wished to indicate by a single appropriate word, my budding Lothario, was that you had thrown away the wrong shoe, with the consequence that Mrs Enderleigh is now on the verge of hysterics at an apparent miracle "

"No!" exclaimed Wich incredulously, "I could not And yet, surely Oh, good Lord, I did! I kept them to make a pair—the new one and the other, instead of Well, I am a prize fathead! What will happen now?"

"What? Why the extreme probability that you have had your trouble for nothing and that Chloe will be sacked after all "

"Oh, I don't think that—not after seeing Mrs Enderleigh You and Chloe both misjudge her strangely She seems the jolliest sort of girl to me I bet she'll understand "

"I'll bet she will," assented Carrados grimly "And when she understands that her pretty servant has been wearing her things, sneaking out at nights (to say nothing about giving burglars the chance of sneaking in) to foot it at dance-halls with the young spark from next-door-but-one, you may not find her quite so sympathetic as she was half an hour ago If she doesn't take the opportunity of calling upon Lady Wich about it I'm badly out "

"It's a mug's business," said Mr Wich with a qualmish note in his voice "What had I better do?"

"What you had better do is to leave it in my hands and agree to my condition "

"What condition?"

"That you never go gallivanting with Chloe again You both 'don't mean anything,' but suppose you did happen to get the girl discharged with a very dubious character? Should you see any alternative to behaving either as a fool or a knave to put it right?"

"Whew!" exclaimed Mr Wich, easing the collar against his neck, "that's heart-to-heart stuff Well, if you can bring it off I'm good for my part Chloe certainly is a dazzling thing, but, strictly between ourselves, her mind is little more than an assortment of obsolete film captions "

When Mr Enderleigh returned from business the next day Myra

greeted him with a subdued note. It was plain that the excitement had quite worn off.

"If Mr Carrados is really going to be useful to you, Guy, of course I shall do my best to amuse him. But I wonder all the same if he is going to make a practice of dropping in every evening."

"How so?" demanded Guy.

"He rang me up this afternoon and hoped that we should both be in later as he would like to call. I had to say we should be charmed."

"Just as well you did, my lady," remarked Guy. "Do you know that quite important people have a most extraordinary opinion of the man, and I am told that Scotland Yard will do anything to oblige him. That's what I've come across to-day."

"My gracious!" said Myra, deeply impressed, "it's just as well I fawned. Talking about police, I met Sergeant Lapworth in the road this morning and he seemed very odd. He said they had received instructions to go slow in taking any steps."

"That ought to suit them down to the ground," suggested Guy pessimistically. "We don't look like seeing any of our plate again, old girl."

"I don't know, Guy. It struck me that Sergeant Lapworth knew more than he would tell. He said that they expected developments."

"It used to be 'were investigating a clue,'" said the unimpressed gentleman.

Mrs Enderleigh had named nine o'clock as a convenient hour and with the busy man's punctuality nine o'clock found Mr Carrados walking up the Homecroft garden path. Looking out, the lady of the house felt a pleasant access of importance, arising from the notable proportions of the car waiting at her gate.

"How nice of you to come again!" she exclaimed playfully. "After the alarms and excursions of yesterday I hardly dared to hope it."

"Oh, yes," he replied prosaically, "your husband and I have some small business details to discuss."

"Of course," she assented quickly. "I am going to leave you at it."

"But first," he continued, "I have a bargain to offer you."

"Offer me? How exciting! Whatever can it be?"

"You really want to get your silver back again?"

"Why, naturally. Guy tells me that we shall only receive about half the value the way our policy goes—isn't it, Guy?"

"I'm afraid it is," admitted her husband.

"And that's only money. To both of us many of the things are priceless."

"While you have no particular affection for that odd pair of shoes?"

"Shoes? Oh, *those*! How ridiculous, Mr Carrados! You are not coming like an up-to-date genie to offer silver plates for old shoes, are you?"

"You have guessed. But there's always a catch about these attractive bargains, you remember. If you agree to let the shoes go, everything connected with them goes also. You have no curiosity, make no inquiries, entertain no suspicions. It is to be as though they and all that appertains to them had never been."

"I wonder if I understand?" mused Myra with a sharp little look in his direction.

"I think you do," replied Carrados. "You are—forgive the homely phrase—no fool, Mrs Enderleigh. If you do not quite understand yet it's only because you have not had time to think about it. You soon would."

"But do you mean that you actually know now where the silver is?" demanded Enderleigh.

"All right, I'll take it," said Myra, with a very sporting air.

"I know where the silver is," Carrados admitted.

"Where?" exclaimed two simultaneous voices.

"When you went off a few days ago, you expressed a wish as to where it might be, Mr Enderleigh, didn't you?"

"What was that?" asked Myra, from whose mind the malediction had apparently faded. Her husband, on the contrary, remembered very well and he coloured at the recollection.

"I am sorry to be reminded of that," he said moodily. "Something happened to put me out, Myra, and in a moment of irritation, without meaning it, I said that I wished the stuff at the bottom of the river. That's all."

"Yes, that's the way with you impulsive people, as we geni are always finding. You want a thing and then discover that you don't. Well, my friend, you have got your wish, willy-nilly. The stuff *is* at the bottom of the river."

"What a lark!" exclaimed the lady.

"The burglars dropped it or hid it there?" said her husband keenly intrigued. "How on earth did you find that out?"

"The burglars had nothing to do with it, because there was no burglar—no burglary," was the reply.

"Oh, but I say! Besides, it's gone. No, Mr Carrados! And then the side door key, you know."

"Hush!" said Carrados mysteriously. "That doesn't count. The side door key went, according to our bargain, with the shoes."

"Very well," acquiesced Myra, with something very like a giggle, "but if there was no burglar how did the silver get into the river?"

"How?" Carrados raised an accusing finger and slowly brought it dead level on his hostess. "How? Behold the culprit! You, my dear lady, threw it there!"

Moved by a common impulse Guy and Myra came slowly to their feet. Looking at Max Carrados's quietly smiling face it seemed impossible to believe that he—to doubt that he—to know what to think.

"I—threw—it—there?" articulated Myra queerly.

"You deliberately cast the 'damned stuff' in. Rising at the dead of night, without staying to put on slippers or to cover those inadequate garments that are no longer the prerogative of my sex, you crept down, carefully replaced the silver lying about, took up the burden, let yourself out by the french window in the drawing-room, crossed the lawn, reached the silent river, and with a sigh of relief at accomplishing so meritorious a task, tipped the whole bag of tricks into the water. All in a profound sleep, of course. By the way, I hope your feet are better to-day?"

Myra sat down again with a strange look in her eyes.

"But I could not—I could not even move the box," she whispered.

"Not when you are awake," he replied, becoming grave again. "And do you know why that is? It is because you know that you cannot, and so, your slavish body assenting, you really cannot. But in your sleep you do not know it, your unbound mind admits no limits, and so——"

"Do you know," interposed Enderleigh sagely, "I've heard something like that several times lately. I suppose there may be something in it after all."

"Anyway," said Mr Carrados, "there is one thing you can congratulate yourself on. A wife who carries out her husband's slightest wish even in her sleep is a woman in a thousand."

Father Brown

THE QUEER FEET

By

G K CHESTERTON

IF you meet a member of that select club, "The Twelve True Fishermen," entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find "The Twelve True Fishermen," or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product—an "exclusive" commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday after-

noon The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in Belgravia. It was a small hotel, and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance—the fact that practically only twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather, and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever, and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand, there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman's servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy, and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object, that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is

simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown's trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon, and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest Popish priest. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that the cleric kept it to himself, but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the writing of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in Buckingham Palace, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or ante-room in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one's own family. Moreover, the priest's appearance was second rate and his clothes muddy, a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge—a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar which probably once occupied its place.

In the office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants' quarters, was the gentlemen's cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen's domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never

be known I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on, his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was—only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel, and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away, would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions, and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down one half of the

corridor in order to walk very slowly down the other half, or he was walking very slowly at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid, he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first—it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No, that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not especially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else—something that he could not remember. He was madened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloak room beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.

The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he would lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside, he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light, then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the odd slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner, and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semi-circular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress, tall, but with an air of not taking up much room, one felt that he could have slid like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthy and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good, humoured and confident, a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown's black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: "I want my hat and coat, please, I find I have to go away at once."

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat, it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter, meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: "I haven't got any silver, you can keep this." And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown's figure remained quite dark and still, but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration—important at

rare crises—when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it

"I think, sir," he said civilly, "that you have some silver in your pocket"

The tall gentleman stared "Hang it," he cried, "If I give you gold, why should you complain?"

"Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold," said the priest mildly, "that is, in large quantities"

The stranger looked at him curiously Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown's head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm Then he seemed to make up his mind He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar

"Stand still," he said, in a hacking whisper "I don't want to threaten you, but——"

"I do want to threaten you," said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, "I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched"

"You're a rum sort of cloak room clerk," said the other

"I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau," said Brown, "and I am ready to hear your confession"

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair

The first two courses of the dinner of the Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody It was written in a sort of super-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen There was a tradition in the club that the *hors d'œuvres* should be various and manifold to the point of madness They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending—a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it Cabinet Ministers on both sides were alluded to by their Christian names with a sort of bored benignity The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom the whole Tory party was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and,

on the whole, praised—as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore Gladstone collars, he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything—not even anything wrong. He was not fast, he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing, and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany—which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the walls like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first clink of knife and fork this army of retainers had vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed irrelevant, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was—how shall I put it?—a vivid shadow, a projection of his personality,

which told that he was hovering near The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgur) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the shapes which God had given them The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated knives and fish forks, and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with So it did, for all I know This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence, and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark "They can't do this anywhere but here"

"Nowhere," said Mr Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times "Nowhere, assuredly, except here It was represented to me that at the Café Anglais——"

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts "It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Café Anglais Nothing like it, sir," he said, shaking his head ruthlessly, like a hanging judge "Nothing like it"

"Overrated place," said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months

"Oh, I don't know," said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, "it's jolly good for some things You can't beat it at——"

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead His stoppage was as silent as his tread, but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed—if a chair ran away from us

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably ending with money A genuine democrat would have asked him, with a comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near them, either as a slave or as a friend That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely a dull, hot embarrassment They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried synod, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of the presidential hammer, and said "Splendid work young Moocher's doing in Burmah. Now, no other nation in the world could have——"

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear "So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?"

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown, now it was a sickly yellow.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Audley," he said, with asthmatic breathlessness "I have great apprehensions. Your fish plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!"

"Well, I hope so," said the chairman, with some warmth.

"You see him?" panted the excited hotel keeper, "you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?"

"Know the waiter?" answered Mr. Audley indignantly "Certainly not!"

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony "I never sent him," he said "I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away."

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants, none of the company could say anything except the man of wood—Colonel Pound—who seemed galvanized into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eye-glass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak "Do you mean," he said, "that somebody has stolen our silver service?"

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness; and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

"Are all your waiters here?" demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

"Yes, they're all here. I noticed it myself," cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the innermost ring "Always count 'em as I come in, they look so queer standing up against the wall."

"But surely one cannot exactly remember," began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

"I remember exactly, I tell you," cried the duke excitedly "There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen to-night, I'll swear, no more and no less"

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise "You say—you say," he stammered, "that you see all my fifteen waiters?"

"As usual," assented the duke "What is the matter with that?"

"Nothing," said Lever, with a deepening accent, "only you did not For one of zem is dead upstairs"

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea One of them—the duke, I think—even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth "Is there anything we can do?"

"He has had a priest," said the Jew, not untouched

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous, broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door "If there was a fifteenth man here, friends," he said, "that fifteenth fellow was a thief Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything, then we'll talk The twenty-four pearls are worth recovering"

Mr Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything, but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the passages divided into two groups Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor to the front room to demand news of any exit Colonel Pound, with the chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor leading to the servants' quarters, as the more likely line of escape As they did so they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow of it

"Hallo, there!" called out the duke "Have you seen any one pass?"

The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said "Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen."

They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen quaintly shaped forks and knives.

"You—you——" began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the room behind him was burst, as if some one had passed violently through.

"Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren't they?" remarked the clergyman, with cheerful composure.

"Did—did you steal those things?" stammered Mr. Audley with staring eyes.

"If I did," said the cleric pleasantly, "at least I am bringing them back again."

"But you didn't," said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.

"To make a clean breast of it, I didn't," said the other, with some humour. And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool.

"But you know who did," said the colonel.

"I don't know his real name," said the priest placidly, "but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented."

"Oh, I say—repented!" cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. "Odd, isn't it," he said, "that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are the Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men."

"Did you catch this man?" asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. "Yes," he said, "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced

colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache

At last he said quietly to the priest "He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer"

"He was a clever fellow," answered the other, "but I am not quite sure of what other you mean"

"I mean you," said the colonel, with a short laugh "I don't want to get the fellow jailed, make yourself easy about that But I'd give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him But I reckon you're the most up-to-date devil of the present company"

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier "Well," he said, smiling, "I mustn't tell you anything of the man's identity, or his own story, of course, but there's no particular reason why I shouldn't tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself"

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire

"You see, colonel," he said, "I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager, then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation, first the run and then the walk, and then the run again I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once One walk I knew, it was just like yours, colonel It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I heard a clink of plates somewhere, and the answer stood up as plain as St Peter's It was the walk of a waiter—that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground, the coat tails and napkin flying Then I thought for a minute and a half more And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it"

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker's mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness

"A crime," he said slowly, "is like any other work of art Don't look surprised, crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop But every work of art, divine

or diabolic, has one indispensable mark—I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in *Hamlet*, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. Well, this also,” he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, “this also is the plain tragedy of a man in black. Yes,” he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, “the whole of this tale turns on a black coat. In this, as in *Hamlet*, there are the rococo excrescences—yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact—some fact that is not itself mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men’s thoughts away from it. This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman’s evening dress is the same as a waiter’s. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too.”

“Still,” said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, “I am not sure that I understand.”

“Colonel,” said Father Brown, “I tell you that this archangel of impudence who stole your forks, walked up and down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors, and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don’t ask me what he was like, you have seen him yourself six or seven times to-night. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the lightning style of a waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the terrace, did something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office and the waiters’ quarters. By the time he had come under the eye of the office clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded insolence which they have all seen in their patrons. It was no new thing to them that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an animal at the Zoo, they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit of walking where one chooses. When he was magnificently weary of walking down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back past the office, in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered

as by a blast of magic, and went hurrying forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an obsequious attendant. Why should the gentleman look at a chance waiter? Why should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he played the coolest tricks. In the proprietor's private quarters he called out breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said genially that he would carry it himself, and he did, he carried it quickly and correctly through the thick of you, a waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the end of the fish course.

"His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row, but even then he contrived to lean against the wall just round the corner in such a way that for that important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the gentlemen thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away from the table, that waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a swift servant, and clear it himself. He put the plates down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his breast pocket, giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till he came to the cloak room. There he had only to be a plutocrat again—a plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the cloak room attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only—only I happened to be the cloak room attendant."

"What did you do to him?" cried the colonel, with unusual intensity. "What did he tell you?"

"I beg your pardon," said the priest immovably, "that is where the story ends."

"And the interesting story begins," muttered Pound. "I think I understand his professional trick. But I don't seem to have got hold of yours."

"I must be going," said Father Brown.

They walked together along the passage to the entrance hall, where they saw the fresh, freckled face of the Duke of Chester, who was bounding buoyantly along towards them.

"Come along, Pound," he cried breathlessly. "I've been looking for you everywhere. The dinner's going again in spanking style, and old Audley has got to make a speech in honour of the forks being saved. We want to start some new ceremony, don't you know, to commemorate the occasion. I say, you really got the goods back, what do you suggest?"

"Why," said the colonel, eyeing him with a certain sardonic approval. "I should suggest that henceforward we wear green coats instead of black. One never knows what mistakes may arise when one looks so like a waiter."

"Oh, hang it all!" said the young man, "a gentleman never looks like a waiter"

"Nor a waiter like a gentleman, I suppose," said Colonel Pound, with the same lowering laughter on his face "Reverend sir, your friend must have been very smart to act the gentleman"

Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand

"Yes," he said, "it must be very hard work to be a gentleman, but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter"

And saying "Good evening," he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny omnibus

Inspector Poole

THE THREE KEYS

By

HENRY WADE

IN a first floor office in Hatton Garden two men sat at separate tables, silent, almost motionless, each staring fixedly in front of him—doing nothing. In one corner of the room a small but very modern safe had been let into the wall, it now stood open, as did the four drawers at the bottom of it, the thoughts of the two occupants of the room were concentrated upon that safe, and for the last twenty minutes, after a spate of furious argument, they had not spoken to one another. Apart from the distant rumble of Holborn traffic the ticking of a clock alone broke the silence.

Except for a similarity of well-made, sombre clothing, and certain unmistakable racial characteristics, the two men were utterly unlike each other, the elder was short, fat, and grey, the younger, tall, thin, and black, they were, in fact, unrelated, but for nearly thirty years they had been intimate friends—until to-day.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, a knock, a small boy ushered in a young man in a dark blue suit, carrying a bowler hat.

“Detective-Inspector Poole, New Scotland Yard,” said the new comer. “You’re Levi, Berg & Phillips, gentlemen? I’m instructed that you asked for an officer to be sent round?”

Instantly the two partners burst into a torrent of speech, stopped, and glared at one another. Inspector Poole recognised the situation at a glance.

“Perhaps it would be more convenient if I took your statements separately, gentlemen,” he said.

After a moment’s struggle to control his raging suspicions the thin Mr. Berg retired and the stout Mr. Levi burst into his tale.

“We are diamond merchants,” he said. “We have been in partnership, Aaron Berg and I, for thirty years. For the last fifteen we have had another partner, George Phillips, who brought capital into the business when things were bad—in the war, when Aaron, who is a German, was interned. Phillips brought his young brother into the business too, a few years ago, but not as a partner—as a clerk.”

“He is here now—your partner, Mr. Phillips?” asked Poole.

“He and his brother have gone away for the Easter holidays, they went last night.”

"Leaving you and Mr Berg in charge?"

"Yes, we do not need a holiday at Easter, we are not Christians"

Mr Levi spoke with quiet dignity, the detective felt an unreasonable inclination to blush

"In the ordinary course of business," continued Mr Levi, "we keep in that safe diamonds, cut and uncut, to a value of from five thousand to twenty thousand pounds at a time. Lately we have been negotiating a big sale and we have had some fine uncut stones of unusual value. When we locked the safe last night there were in it stones to the value of more than £30,000. This afternoon there are none"

The old man's flabby jowl quivered with emotion

"You say the safe was locked last night, sir, who locked it?"

With a gesture of his pudgy hand, Mr Levi indicated that he would explain everything—in his own way

"The safe has three keys, two of which open the door and one which opens the drawers—in which the diamonds are kept, the body of the safe only holds ledgers and important papers. Berg and Phillips each have a key of the door, I alone have the key of the drawers—but I have not a key of the door. Once the drawers and safe have been locked, the diamonds can only be reached if both Berg and I or Phillips and I are present. The keys never leave our possession, we never give them to any one else to open the safe or the drawers, the holder of the key, alone, operates it. That is the only way to be safe"

The detective, his eye on the empty safe, reflected that even this system did not appear to be infallible

"Yesterday afternoon Berg was away on business in Birmingham. Phillips and I checked our stock at the end of the day, then I locked the drawers and he locked the door of the safe. We then left the house together"

"One moment, sir," interposed Poole. "Are you sure that Mr Phillips did lock the door?"

"Yes, I tried it, just as he had tried the drawers after I locked them. That is our invariable rule"

"And you left the house—empty? No one in charge?"

"No one. We all have keys, including young Harold Phillips, but not the office boy. I sleep here, but I frequently leave the house for three or four hours at a time. The safe-makers declared that nothing less than six hours' work with an oxy-acetylene apparatus could open that safe—except the keys"

Poole nodded, and Mr Levi continued

"Phillips and I went together to the All British Sports Club for a Turkish bath. It is our custom once a fortnight, we are both inclined to fleshiness. We arrived there at about six, bathed to-

gether and left together at about half past seven I returned "

"One minute, sir, please While you were in the Turkish bath, where were your keys?"

"Locked up with my pocket book in a drawer watched over by the attendant who issues the towels "

"And the key of the drawer?"

"That remained in my clothes "

"And was still there when you dressed?"

"Yes "

"And your keys and pocket book you found all right in the drawer?"

"Yes "

Mr Levi then told how he had returned home, tried the safe and found it locked, dined in his sitting-room above, off an omelette cooked by himself, and a half bottle of claret, and gone to bed early with a book In the morning—this morning—he had been out visiting other merchants, leaving his partner, Aaron Berg, alone in the office This afternoon there had been occasion to open the safe to get out some stones for a client and it was as the inspector saw it

"The drawers were locked?"

"Yes, they were locked—but empty "

"Any theory, sir?"

Mr Levi raised his shoulders and spread his hands in the expressive manner of his race, he looked across at Berg's table

"What other can there be?" he said "They were all right when I locked them up last night, they are gone this morning—after he has been alone with them "

"But the key of the drawers—your key?"

"Some time he must have got hold of it made a copy " Suddenly a spasm of savage rage convulsed the Jew's face "Never before has such a thing happened to me," he snarled "You must stop them, if they once reach Amsterdam they are gone—lost "

"Amsterdam?"

"Yes, to be cut—so that they cannot be recognised Van Dolling he will send them to—or Joost, they would ask no questions "

Inspector Poole, recognising the need for quick action in the matter of the stones, postponed more detailed questioning of Mr Levi till later His interview with the partner, Berg, followed similar lines, with the variation that Phillips and Levi must have stolen the gems on the previous night, Phillips taking them to Amsterdam (neither partner appeared to have a moment's hesitation as to the destination of the stolen diamonds) on his pretended holiday

"Did Mr Phillips tell you where he was going for his holiday?" asked Poole

"Yes, to Whitchurch in Hampshire, to fish A 'blind' of course"

Soon after his arrival, Poole had telephoned to the Yard for a photographer and for Sergeant Gower and two plain-clothes men. Photographs of the finger-prints which powder revealed on the safe and drawers having been taken, Poole departed, leaving the two plain-clothes men to "keep an eye on" the partners from a discreet distance. Sergeant Gower was sent straight off to Holland, while Poole himself returned to the Yard and was soon on the telephone to the Amsterdam police, those competent officials at once enlarged the list of "cutters" to whom the stones might be assigned and promised not only to keep an eye on them, but to investigate their parcel post.

Feeling that this part of the inquiry might now be left safely to Sergeant Gower and his Dutch colleagues, Poole made his way to the All British Sports Club. As he entered the huge, over-decorated building and asked for the secretary, the detective smiled at the All British sportsmanship of many of its swarming members, still, the place provided entertainment and exercise for many who would not be readily welcomed elsewhere.

Accompanied by an underling allotted to him by the majestic secretary, Poole made his way to the Turkish baths. The place was filling up, and the detective was surprised to see what a steady flow of clients it attracted. The underling explained the procedure, an attendant issued tickets and towels in return for two shillings, a client with valuables placed them in a numbered drawer, which the attendant then locked, handing the key to the client, a second attendant at the door of the Turkish bath took the tickets and saw that no unauthorised person entered the rooms. Clients then undressed in cubicles separated by curtains which, where two friends wished to be together, could be drawn open. The ticket and towel office was, the underling explained, common to users of the Turkish bath and the swimming bath.

The "ticket and towel" attendant remembered Mr. Levi and Mr. George Phillips taking Turkish bath tickets the previous evening, they were well-known members. He had given each a drawer for valuables, locked them away, and handed over the keys, he did not, of course, remember or keep note of the number of the drawers—a member just handed back his key and he (the attendant) unlocked the corresponding drawer. He did not remember doing so for Mr. Levi and Mr. Phillips, but he was off duty from 7 to 8 p.m., during which period, no doubt, they had finished their post-bath "siesta" and reclaimed their belongings. His colleague, who came on duty at seven, would be able to check that.

The attendant on duty at the door of the Turkish bath also remembered the arrival and departure of the two partners at about

the hours stated by Mr Levi—6 and 7 30 p m Neither had left the "bath" in between those hours, nor come to the door to communicate with any one outside There was no other entrance to the Turkish bath

The detective thanked his informants and returned to the secretary's office, where he ascertained that Mr Harold Phillips was also a member, though of only six months' standing Returning to the bath floor, the detective found that the "ticket and towel" attendant did not know Mr Harold Phillips by sight, the Turkish bath attendant, however, did, and was prepared to swear that Mr Harold had not entered his domain at all on the previous evening

A door porter—there were three on duty—remembered seeing Mr Harold Phillips enter the club on the previous evening—he thought some time after seven, no, exact notes of arrival and departure of members were not kept, there were too many of them

The information which Poole had obtained at the club strengthened his impression that the two Phillips were much more likely to be responsible for the robbery than either of the two life-long partners It was too much of a coincidence to believe that the theft was unconnected with the convenient holiday which would enable one of them to get to Amsterdam and dispose of the stones, while the presence of the two brothers at the club at a time when Mr Levi was temporarily separated from his key was also highly significant At the moment it was not clear how the trick had been worked, as Harold Phillips had not entered the Turkish bath, nor George Phillips left it before his partner It would have been easy for George Phillips to get the key of the lock-up drawer out of his partner's clothes while the latter was bathing, but then he would have to get Levi's keys out of the drawer—and surely Levi would have missed them? Besides, Levi had gone straight home from the club and was positive that nobody could have opened the safe after that without his hearing them

Poole decided to leave the club until he had had time to think it over, and in the meantime to trace the movements of the two Phillips, it was essential to find out whether either of them had gone to Amsterdam, Poole did not believe that the stones would have been sent by post—the watching of parcels to well-known cutters (of doubtful reputation) would be such an obvious move for the police

To begin with, it was important to get hold of a photograph of the two men, and the first place to try for that was their flat, the address of which Levi had given him Fortunately their house-keeper was at home and ready to talk The brothers, she said, had returned to the flat soon after 9 p m on the previous evening and had been busy packing for their holiday This morning Mr Harold had left soon after eight, she understood he was going down to

Whitchurch on his motor-bicycle Mr George had left in a taxi at a quarter past nine to catch the 9.30 at Waterloo, he had been late starting and was in a stew that he might miss it The Bull Inn, Whitchurch, was his address Both had appeared in excellent spirits

Poole succeeded in persuading Mrs Bompon to show him the Phillips' sitting-room, from which he had no great difficulty in purloining a framed snapshot of the brothers in tennis kit, this he took to Scotland Yard, where it would be enlarged, and a copy sent by air mail to the Amsterdam police

The mention of "air mail" put another thought into Poole's head, and he betook himself to Airways House, where he learnt that a service had left Croydon that morning at 9.30 a.m. due to arrive at Amsterdam at 12 noon All the passengers had booked seats beforehand and had travelled to Croydon by the Company's bus, which left Airways House at 8.40 a.m. None of them was named Phillips, nor (so far as the door porter, who helped to load it, remembered) did any of them resemble one of the brothers

The 6.8 from Waterloo got Poole to Whitchurch at 7.55 p.m. He booked a bed and entered the dining-room just as most of the guests were finishing dinner In one corner of the room, discussing port, walnuts, and some absorbing topic, were, unmistakably, the two Phillips Poole felt a first twinge of doubt

A good dinner restored some of the confidence, and it was not long before he found an opportunity to present himself and his card to the Phillips in an otherwise empty card-room The brothers displayed suitable degrees of surprise and consternation at his news, but it was impossible to tell whether these were feigned or real Poole explained that he was bound to question closely everybody connected with the firm and suggested that it would be more in order for him to take each account separately Mr George Phillips—dark, clean-shaven, and (as Levi had said) slightly inclined to fleshiness, readily agreed and took first turn

He repeated, in rather different words, the account already given by Levi of the affairs of the partnership, the arrangements for opening the safe, the actual closing of it—after checking its contents—by himself and Levi on the previous evening, of their visit to the club and their Turkish bath

Poole did not want at this stage to reveal too great an interest in the whereabouts of Mr Levi's keys during that bath, but he got a statement from George Phillips that he had not himself left the bath between the times of his arrival and departure with Levi, and had not spoken to, or even seen, his brother in the club

Continuing his story, Phillips explained that he had dined with a friend in Soho and returned early to his flat in order to pack and to "tidy up" his affairs before his holiday, which was to last

a week This morning he had been lazy and had left his final packing rather late, with the result that he had gone off in a rush and just missed his train—the 9 30 from Waterloo He had to kick his heels about for two hours and go down by the 11 31, reaching Whitchurch at 2 59 The news brought by Poole had come as a complete shock for him, he had no explanation to offer or theory to advance, he trusted his partners absolutely, though Jews, they were “thoroughly good fellows”

Poole asked a number of questions designed to peg Phillips down to exact facts and times and to ascertain the chances of confirmation of his story—independent witnesses The most important one was the taxi-driver who had driven Phillips to the station—a man whom the diamond merchant knew well and employed frequently

“And your luggage, sir, while you were waiting for the next train, did you put it in the cloak room?”

“No, I gave the porter a bob and told him to put it in the train when it came in I don’t know what he did with it meanwhile, but it turned up at Whitchurch with *mé* all right”

“And you yourself, during those two hours?”

“I went for a stroll—over the river by Waterloo Bridge and back by Westminster Then I had a cup of coffee and a bun in the refreshment room and got into the train”

Mr Phillips knew of no witness to confirm this, though, of course, somebody might have noticed him In any case, it did not seem important, if the taxi-driver confirmed the first part of the story, Phillips could not have got to Amsterdam and back in two hours, even by air If either brother had gone, it must be Harold

Harold, however, apparently had not gone He had started off on his motor-bike at about half-past eight, travelling by Woking The bike had given a good deal of trouble—ignition—and he had had to push the damn thing for a mile or more into a garage in Basingstoke, which he had reached about twelve They were busy with holiday traffic and could not tackle it at once, so he had decided to get some lunch and look in at a cinema for an hour or two, the garage thought they could get the job done some time after three The film—a Greta Garbo—had proved sufficiently attractive to keep him till after four, he had then collected his bike and pushed on for the remaining ten miles, arriving in time for a late tea

Coming down to details, he kept his machine in London at the Hawkworth Garage, Wardour Street, the Basingstoke garage which did the repairs was called something like Fairfax, the name of the restaurant he did not know, but it was in the main street opposite the Town Hall, he was wearing khaki overalls over his blue tweed, George had brought his luggage, except a small case carried on the bike He had no knowledge of the theft As to the

previous evening, he had left the office at 5.30, had a game of billiards and a swim, followed by dinner at the Sports Club, and gone home early to pack

Confirmation? Yes, Jack Freestone with whom he had played billiards; possibly the bath attendant, the Hawkworth Garage proprietor, the Basingstoke garage, the restaurant, the landlord here, all those should be able to confirm his story

If they did, thought Poole, it would go a long way to upsetting his theory that one of the brothers had taken the stones to Amsterdam. All the same, this story of Harold's was much more suspicious than George's, that "breakdown," the Greta Garbo film that had lured him into unwitnessed dallying, these were "such stuff as alibis are cooked of." Of course, it was possible, even if the Phillips had stolen the stones, that they had used some third party to convey them out of England—or even that they had not gone out of England at all. Poole, however, felt very doubtful of the third party—it was adding so enormously to the risk—and for the moment he decided to stick to the Amsterdam theory. Anyhow, he would check the alibis.

Before going to bed, Poole went to the Whitchurch Police Station and rang up the Yard. Superintendent Gower had already been through on the phone from Amsterdam and reported that the Dutch postal authorities were certain that no parcel, registered or otherwise, had reached any of the suspected cutters from England during the short period that had elapsed since the theft, all the "suspects" were now being watched by the police. Poole asked that Gower might be told to investigate the Amsterdam end of the Air Service.

Early the next morning, Poole obtained from his landlord, from a cabman, and from a railway porter, confirmation of the approximate times of arrival of the two Phillips and their luggage. To simplify his further task, Harold offered to accompany him to Basingstoke—in fact to take him there on the pillion of his bike. George returned to London to discuss affairs with his partners, over the telephone Poole arranged for him to be met and shadowed.

Harold, a younger and slimmer edition of his brother, with a dark moustache, had put on the overalls he had worn the previous day in order to assist in the identification. A waitress and a cashier at the restaurant both "thought they remembered him," though they had been too busy to take particular notice of customers. The garage people also identified him and confirmed approximately the times of his arrival and departure. The repair hand further remembered noticing the small case on the back of the bicycle, the gentleman had, he said, taken it with him when he went off for lunch. Harold had not previously mentioned this, but now agreed that he had done so, as the case contained papers and a few valu-

ables. Returning to the restaurant, Poole got rather a vague assurance from the waitress that "she thought the man she remembered had carried a case", the cashier had not noticed. Nobody at Greta Garbo's cinema remembered seeing Harold—but it was unlikely that they would.

So far, then, the alibi held, though Poole knew from experience that he might even yet find a flaw in it, there would be no difficulty, even as it was, in finding a hole of about two hours, as there had been in George's, but at the moment this did not appear to be of any value.

Leaving Harold Phillips to return to Whitchurch (that young man being disinclined, apparently, to sacrifice his holiday for any disaster of the firm's) Poole returned to London and had soon unearthed Mr Biggut, the taxi-driver who had taken George Phillips to Waterloo the previous morning. Biggut had done his best to get to Waterloo by 9.30, but had never had a chance, he had reached the station about two minutes after the half hour. In reply to the detective's question, he stated that many a time had he driven Mr Phillips to a station and never before had he had to hurry, Mr Phillips was one of those that liked to get there with ten minutes to spare. An interesting exception to the habit of a lifetime.

Poole had no great difficulty in unearthing the porter who had handled George Phillips' luggage. Yes, the train had been missed all right, trains *left* Waterloo on time (whatever might be the case as to their arrival, was the implication). He had "kept an eye on" the luggage and put it into the 11.31, he had not seen Mr Phillips get into the train, but, having received his tip, was not looking for him.

Making his way to the booking-office, Poole ascertained that sixteen tickets to Whitchurch had been issued on the previous day, two first and fourteen thirds. The clerk had no recollection of the purchasers, but one of the first-class tickets had, he thought, been issued in the morning and one in the afternoon.

The porter, re-discovered, confirmed the fact that "the gentleman" had taken a first-class ticket—he had had to produce it before the luggage could be labelled, owing to the question of overweight. The gentleman had, he said, carried a small case with him, otherwise everything went into the van, including two fishing rods, which—in his experience—most gentlemen liked to have in the carriage with them.

Although George Phillips' story had been practically confirmed by the taxi-driver and porter, one or two points of possible interest had emerged—such as the man's usual punctuality and his lack of care for his fishing rods. As in the case of Harold, the alibi held, but it was not absolutely convincing.

In search of further confirmation of Harold's story, the detective returned to the All British Sports Club. He was lucky enough to find there Mr Jack Freestone, still digesting a late lunch, Mr Freestone remembered quite well the game of billiards—only a hundred up—about six-ish, he thought.

The "ticket and towel" attendant—who issued towels for the swimming bath as well as for the Turkish bath—again announced that he did not know Mr Harold Phillips by sight, nor did an inspection of the enlarged snapshot, with which Poole was now armed, refresh his memory. The hall-porter, re-questioned, was sure that it was nearer seven than 5.30 that he had noticed Mr Harold Phillips come in.

This was the first definite point in the young man's story, upon which doubt had been cast. Poole wondered what the implication of it was. Suddenly a point struck him, the "towel" attendant had said (in connection with the time of departure of Levi and George Phillips) that he was off duty from seven to eight, if Harold Phillips really came in at seven he must have had his bath when the man was off duty. It was worth questioning his substitute, though if Harold came in at seven, what became of Mr Freestone's story of a six-ish game of billiards? A plain lie?

The substitute, now doing duty in the squash rackets dressing-room, did not know Harold Phillips by name, but on being shown the enlarged photograph of the two brothers, recognised them both, the elder had come out of the Turkish bath during his tour of duty in the towel office (7 to 8 p.m.) and had taken his belongings out of one of the locked drawers, he had been accompanied by another gentleman, of Jewish appearance, who had done the same.

"The Jewish gentleman found his belongings in his drawer all right?" asked Poole.

"Oh, yes, sir, I know he did that, because I noticed how careful he was to examine them. I asked him if he thought I'd pinched any."

The younger gentleman in the photograph had been for the swimming bath. He had only been in, the attendant thought, a short time, and had left about ten minutes before the elder gentleman.

Once more Poole repaired to the Turkish bath. His conversation with its attendants led him into the lavatory which opened off the changing-room, where he apparently became absorbed in the theory and practice of ventilation. When he came out, he was smiling.

Returning to the Yard, Poole put a call through to Amsterdam, and within a short time heard Sergeant Gower's voice.

"Think I've got some news for you, sir. When the photograph

arrived by 'plane this morning, I showed it to the Dutch aerodrome people. They were certain neither of the men arrived yesterday, but one of them *left*—by the 12 15 service for England. The younger one booked as 'Roberts'."

"Good work!" said Poole. "Did you ask what time the 'plane from England arrived yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, it arrived ten minutes ahead of schedule—11 50 a.m. It generally does, never late except in bad weather."

"Any one on it at all like Phillips?"

"Two men might have been him, according to height and build. One was clean shaven and one had a beard and specs."

"He's got his own moustache to-day," said Poole. "It must have been the one with a beard. Would he have had time to hand over the jewels, change his appearance, and board the return bus?"

"I asked that, sir. They thought he might if the chap he was handing to was on the spot."

The question now was, how Harold Phillips had appeared on a motor-bicycle in Basingstoke at about the same time as he left Amsterdam in an aeroplane. Obviously he hadn't. Who had? Equally obviously, his brother George—disguised in overalls and a black moustache. How had he done it? Poole remembered that the porter at Waterloo had said that George Phillips had kept in his own possession a small case, no doubt that had contained the overalls. George had probably gone down to the lavatory and changed into them—and the moustache, it might be possible to check that. Then he would go and collect Harold's bicycle—from where? Harold had taken it out of his own garage in Wardour Street at "about 8 30 a.m.", he had presented himself at Airways House—off the Haymarket—in a beard and out of overalls—at 8 40 a.m., obviously that bicycle was somewhere pretty close to those localities, it should not be difficult to find.

It was not, at his third shot Poole found a huge new garage off Coventry Street, sufficiently well organised to keep a note of the registered numbers of the cars and bicycles left in its care, together with the names of the depositors. A four-horse-power Rampant bicycle No. XX2320 had been deposited at 8 30 a.m. the previous morning by a "Mr. Roberts," who had removed it at 9 45 a.m. Questioned as to "Mr. Roberts," the attendant described Harold Phillips, it had not occurred to him that the man who had removed the bicycle an hour later was any different to the depositor, but "now that he came to think of it," the depositor *had* seemed a slimmer and younger man than the remover. He remembered that the latter had strapped a small suitcase on the carrier.

George Phillips, then, had ridden that bicycle to Whitchurch

and Harold had gone down by train. But wait a minute. The brother who had arrived by train had reached Whitchurch at 2 59—when Harold was still in the air, what was more, he had arrived—must have arrived—without a moustache, in the guise of George, it was in fact George who then arrived—it would have been impossible to deceive the landlord of the “Bull.” That, of course, was the explanation of the long delay and the cinema interval in Basingstoke, that was when George and Harold had again exchanged identities. But just how?

Poole sought a Bradshaw and found that, to arrive at Whitchurch at 2 59, George must have got into the train at Basingstoke at 12 56—the 11 31 from Waterloo into which the porter had put his luggage. On Harold’s bicycle he had reached Basingstoke “about twelve,” so that he would have had time to have the restaurant lunch which had formed part of Harold’s alibi. After that, he got into the train as Harold, removed overalls and moustache, put them in the case which the Basingstoke garage man had noticed him remove from the carrier, and arrived at Whitchurch correctly as George.

What had Harold done? It was unquestionably he who had retrieved the bicycle from the Basingstoke garage “some time after four.” How had he done it? Bradshaw showed that a train leaving Waterloo at 3 30 reached Basingstoke at 4 40. That was a generous “after four,” but not impossible, the garage must be more closely questioned about the time of departure. But was it possible for Harold, leaving Amsterdam at 12 15, to catch the 3 30 at Waterloo?

Poole flipped over the pages of Bradshaw till he found “Air Services.” The 12 15 from Amsterdam deposited its passengers by the Company’s bus at Airways House at 3 30 p.m.!

Was this a snag?

A second glance showed that the ‘plane reached Croydon at 2 45. That looked more possible. If the bus could get to Havmarket by 3 30, a taxi from Croydon would get to Waterloo before that. So Harold had caught the 3 30 from Waterloo, arrived at Basingstoke at 4 40, wearing a similar pair of overalls and carrying a similar suitcase, recovered the bicycle, and reached Whitchurch in time for a late tea. The only part of the alibi which did not fit in to this double story was the cinema—and that was the one part of it for which no confirmation was forthcoming. The whole thing would have to be tested and proved, but Poole had no shadow of doubt but that was how Harold’s journey to Amsterdam and alibi in England had been worked.

* * * * *

At 8 30 a.m. the following morning, Inspector Poole called at the Phillips’ flat and invited George to accompany him on a vague

errand of "identification" George, willing to do anything, went Ten minutes later, another police inspector, Travers, did the same thing with Harold, Harold appeared less willing

At 8.45 a.m. the Turkish bath of the All British Sports Club is usually empty, though the attendants are ready for anything This morning they were surprised to see a member, accompanied by the secretary and two other men (one of whom was known to be a "tec," while the second looked it) march into the changing-room without removing his shoes or carrying a towel and "slip" Mr Phillips, they noticed, was talkative—but rather white He showed his companions the compartment in which he and Mr Levi had undressed for their bath two evenings ago, and where each had hung his clothes—on hooks only a few feet away from each other "And who was undressed first, Mr Phillips?" asked the detective

George's eyes wavered

"Well, really," he said "I don't think I can remember that"

"Do you remember?" Poole turned to an attendant who had joined the group

"Yes, sir," said the man quietly "The other gentleman was ready first and went off to the hot rooms Mr Phillips was a minute or two later"

"And then? Did he go straight to the hot rooms?"

"I think he went to the lavatory first, sir"

"Perhaps you'll show us"

The little procession, the second stranger keeping very close to a now ashen Mr Phillips, made for the lavatory off the changing-room It was a roomy place, containing wash-basins as well as two cabinets and other conveniences The wall opposite the door did not quite reach the ceiling, no doubt for purposes of through-ventilation "Did you come in here, Mr Phillips?" asked Poole in a rather loud voice

George Phillips stared at him, but before he could answer there was a tinkle of steel on marble, a key lay on the floor at their feet "Was that how your brother passed Mr Levi's key back?" asked the detective

Phillips turned like lightning and made a dive for the door—but got no further than the willing arms of Detective Constable Rawton

"Bring him through, Travers," called Poole

A few seconds later, Harold Phillips, accompanied by Inspector Travers and another plain-clothes detective, joined the group in the Turkish bath The brothers were duly cautioned and wisely elected to be silent

* * * *

"When I first went to the Turkish bath," Poole explained to

his Chief, "I found that there was only one door to the place and that George Phillips had not been near it between the time of his arrival and departure, that seemed to squash the idea of his having passed Levi's key to any one outside. But when I found that Harold had been in the club at about the same time and had used the swimming bath next door, with joint lock-up arrangements with the Turkish bath, I couldn't swallow it as a coincidence. So I looked again and found that the lavatories of the Turkish and swimming baths adjoined each other and that though there was no door between, there was a ventilation hole.

"Harold's movements were rather difficult to follow because in a huge place like that the movements of members aren't followed very carefully, and besides, the attendants are sometimes relieved by others while they have meals, but this is what happened. Levi and George Phillips locked the safe and its drawers and went off to the Turkish bath, there Levi locked away his keys and pocket book in a drawer—or rather the 'towel attendant' locked the drawer, giving the key to Levi. George also locked up some keys and a pocket book, but kept the safe key in his pocket. After they'd undressed next to each other, George made an excuse to be a bit behind-hand, and as soon as Levi had gone off to the hot rooms, George pinched the key of the drawer from his pocket, and went into the lavatory.

"In the meantime, Harold had reached the club half an hour earlier, had a quick game of billiards by way of alibi, went down to the swimming bath, locked his goods away and had a swim—or perhaps went straight into the swimming-bath lavatory. There he waited till George whistled, gave an all-clear whistle back (I'm guessing this) and George chucked Levi's drawer key and his own safe key through the ventilator. Off goes Harold to the towel attendant, hands in Levi's key, and gets the drawer with Levi's keys and pocket book in it. There are so many members in and out that the attendants don't notice whose drawer is which, they just hand over the one belonging to the key given to them.

"Harold slips out of the club, back to Hatton Garden, opens the safe and drawers with George's and Levi's keys, takes the diamonds, back to the club (he was noticed going in at 7 p.m.), down to the swimming bath, locks up Levi's keys and pocket book in another drawer, and—again to signal or time—chucks the key back to George in the Turkish-bath lavatory, George slips it back into Levi's trousers—perhaps while they're dressing. Levi finds his pocket book and keys all correct, not realising they're in a different drawer. Finally, Harold collects his own things with his own key, which has been in his pocket all the time. And so to Amsterdam and—gaol."

Miles Bredon

SOLVED BY INSPECTION

By

RONALD KNOX

MILES BREDON, the eminently indefatigable Enquiry Agent, was accustomed to describe himself as a perfect fool at his job. Here he was in agreement with his wife Angela, where he differed from her was in really regarding himself as a fool at his job. There she knew better, and so, fortunately for both of them, did the Indescribable—that vast Insurance Company which employed him to investigate the more questionable transactions of its clients, and saved itself about five thousand a year by doing so. On one occasion, however, Bredon did claim to have really solved a problem by inspection, without any previous knowledge to put him on the right track. Indeed, since he seldom read the cheaper kind of newspaper, it is probable that he had never heard of the eccentric millionaire, Herbert Jervison, until Herbert Jervison was found dead in his bed. He was only supplied with the facts of the situation as he travelled down in the train to Wiltshire with Dr Simmonds, the expensive medical man whom the Indescribable valued almost as much as Bredon himself. It was a bright summer's morning, and the dewy fields, horizoned by lazy stretches of canal, would have been food enough for meditation if Simmonds had not been so confoundedly anxious to impart information.

"You must have heard of him," he was saying. "He was a newspaper boom long before he was a casualty. The Million and a Half Mystic—that was the sort of thing they called him. Why is it that the grossly rich never have the least idea how to spend money? This Jervison had pottered about in the East, and had got caught with all that esoteric bulge—talked about Mahatmas and Yogis and things till even the most sanguine of his poor relations wouldn't ask him to stay. So he settled down at Yewbury here with some Indian frauds he had picked up, and said he was the Brotherhood of Light. Had it printed on his notepaper, which was dark green. Ate nuts and did automatic writing and made all sorts of psychic experiments, till the papers were all over him, that sort of stuff gets them where they live. And then, you see, he went and died."

"That's a kind of publicity we all achieve sooner or later. If they all did it later, our job with the Indescribable would be a

soft one. Anyhow, why did they send for me? He probably choked on a Brazil nut or something. No question of murder or suicide or anything, is there?"

"That's just the odd part about it. He died suddenly, of starvation."

"I suppose you want me to say that's impossible. No medical man myself, I am astute enough to see that my leg is being pulled. Let's hear more about it. Did you ever see the fellow?"

"Not till he came in to be vetted for his insurance. I've been kicking myself over that, because, you see, I thought he was about the soundest life I'd ever struck. He was only fifty-three, and of course these people who go in for Oriental food-fads do sometimes pull off a longevity record. In fact, he had the cheek to ask for a specially low premium, because he said he was in a fair way to discovering the secret of immortality—which, as he pointed out, would make his premium a permanent asset to the Company. And then he goes and kills himself by refusing his mash. Mark you, I'm not sure I wouldn't sooner starve than eat the sort of muck he ate, but then, he seemed to cherish on it."

"And there was really nothing wrong with him? What about his top storey?"

"Well, he admitted to nerves, and I must say he showed up badly over some of the nerve tests. You know we take the nervy people up to the top of the Indescribable Building nowadays, to see whether it gives them the jim-jams. Well, this fellow was at the end of his tether, you couldn't get him to look over the edge for love or money. But if his relations had wanted him certified—and they'd every reason to—I couldn't have done it. Colney Hatch wasn't on the map, I'd swear to that, even at a Directors' Meeting."

"So he went off and died suddenly of starvation. Could you amplify that statement a bit?"

"Well, what really happened was that he shut himself up for ten days or so in the room he calls his laboratory. I haven't seen it, but it's an old gymnasium or racquet-court, they tell me. There was nothing queer in that, because he was always shutting himself up to do his fool experiments, locked himself in and wasn't to be disturbed on any account. Probably thought his astral body was wandering about in Thibet. But—this is the odd thing—he was fully victualled, so I hear, for a fortnight. And at the end of the ten days he was found dead in his bed. The local doctor, who has been out in the East and served a famine area, says it's the clearest case of starvation he's ever met."

"And the food?"

"The food was untouched. I say, this is Westbury, where the car's going to meet us. I didn't tell Dr Mayhew. I was bringing a friend, how exactly am I going to explain you?"

"Tell him I'm the representative of the Company That always fetches them Hallo, there's a black man on the platform "

"That'll be the chauffeur No thanks, no luggage Good morning, are you from Yewbury? Dr Simmonds, my name is, I think Dr Mayhew expects me Outside, is he? Good Come along, Bredon "

Dr Mayhew was a little round-faced man who seemed incapable of suspicion and radiated hospitality You saw at once that he was the kind of country doctor who suffers from having too little company, and can scarcely be got to examine your symptoms because he is so anxious to exchange all the news first He outdid Simmonds himself in his offhand way of referring to the tragedy

"Awfully good of you fellows to come," he said "Not that I'm anxious for a second opinion here Nine cases out of ten, *you* know that well enough, one signs the death certificate on an off-chance, but there ain't any doubt about this poor devil I've been in a famine area, you know, and seen the symptoms often enough to make you dream of it, not pleasant, are they? I expect Mr—oh, yes, Bredon, to be sure, Mr Bredon won't want to see the corpus They've got it parked up at the Brotherhood House, ready to be disposed of when it's finished with, the—er—symptoms come on rather suddenly, you know, Mr Bredon, in these cases What about coming round to my house and having a spot of something on the way? Sure you won't? Oh, very well Yes, they've got to bury him in some special way of their own, tuck him up with his feet towards Jericho, I expect, or something of that sort Hope these niggers'll clear out after this," he added, lowering his voice for fear the driver should overhear him "The neighbours don't like 'em, and that's a fact They're not pukka Indians, you know, he picked them up in San Francisco or somewhere, lascars, I should call 'em."

"I don't know that you're likely to be rid of them, Doctor," explained Bredon "I suppose you realise that they benefit heavily under Jervison's will? At least, his insurance policy is made out in favour of the Brotherhood, and I suppose there'll be a tidy piece of his own money coming to them as well "

"And your Company pays up, does it, Mr Bredon?" said the little doctor "Gad, I wonder if they'd let me into the brotherhood? There are only four of them in it, and I could do with a few extra thousands "

"Well," explained Bredon, "that's what we're here about If it's suicide, you see, they can't touch the money Our policies don't cover suicide, it would be too much of a temptation "

"That so? Well then, you're on velvet The thing can only be suicide, and unsound mind at that There's Yewbury, up on the hill Queer place, very rich man had it, name of Rosenbach, and

fitted it all up like a palace, with a real racquet-court, that's the roof of it you see there. Then he crashed, and the place was sold for next to nothing, taken on as a preparatory school, it was, by a young fellow called Enstone; I liked him, but he never could make the place pay properly, one way and another, so he sold out and went to the South Coast, and then Jervison took it on. Well, here we are. Would you like to wander about the grounds, Mr Bredon, while we go in and look at the remains, or what?"

"I think I'd like to go into the room where he was found. Perhaps one of these natives would take me in, I'd like to have a chance of talking to one of them."

The arrangement was made without difficulty, though Bredon found his guide a source of embarrassment, almost of nervousness. The driver of the car had worn an ordinary dark suit, but this other representative of the community was dressed in flowing white robes, with a turban to match, and seemed covered all over with cabalistic emblems. He was tall and strongly built, his manner was at once impassive and continually alert, nothing seemed to disturb him, yet you felt that nothing escaped him. And when he spoke, he belied his whole appearance by talking English with a violently American intonation.

The racquet-court stood at a considerable distance from the main block of buildings, perhaps five hundred yards away. The gallery which had once existed close to the door had been cleared away to make space when it had been turned into a gymnasium, and you entered directly into a huge oblong room, with something of a cathedral vastness in its effects of distance and of silence. The floor had been fitted with shiny red oil-cloth, so that your footsteps were deadened, and the echoes of the place awoke only at the sound of your voice. The light came chiefly, and the ventilation entirely, from a well in the centre of the roof; the top of this was of fixed glass, and only the iron slats at the side were capable of letting in air. There were still memories of the gymnasium period, at four points in the ceiling were iron rings, which looked as if ropes had hung down from them by hooks, and there were lockers at one side which still seemed to demand the presence of juvenile boots. Little had been done since in the way of furnishing, the eccentric had evidently used the place when he wanted to be separated from his kind, with the thick walls shutting out the sounds of the countryside, the heavy locked doors preventing intrusion. Bredon could not help wondering if the owner had felt safer sleeping in here than under the same roof with his questionable *protégés*.

But two pieces of furniture there were, which attracted attention almost equally as symptoms of the recent tragedy. One was a bed, standing out in the very middle of the floor, a temporary arrangement, apparently, since it was a wheeled bed with iron railings, of

the type common in hospitals, and the wheels had dragged lines across the linoleum, which still shone from their passage. The bed itself was absolutely bare, even the under-blanket had been torn out from its position, and lay, with the other blankets and the sheets, on and around the bed in grotesque confusion. It had the air, Bredon felt, of a bed from which the occupant has been pulled out, rather than of one which the occupant has left, in whatever hurry or excitement, of his own free will. Beyond the bed, against the wall farthest from the entrance, stood a sideboard, plentifully laden with vegetarian food. There was a loaf of bread, made of some very coarse grain, a honeycomb in a glass dish, a box of dates, some biscuits which looked brittle as glue, even, in witness of Simmonds' accuracy, some nuts. It was not a room in which the ordinary man would have sat down cheerfully to a meal, but, what was more important, it was a room in which you could not possibly starve.

Bredon went to the sideboard first of all, and gave the exhibits a careful scrutiny. He felt the outside of the bread, and satisfied himself, from the hardness of the "fly-walk," that it had remained for several days untasted. He tried some milk from a jug which stood there, and found it, as he had expected, thoroughly sour. "Did Mr. Jervison always have sour milk?" he asked of his guide, who was watching all his movements with grave interest. "No, sir," was the answer. "I took that milk in myself, the evening when we last saw the prophet alive. It was sweet milk, fresh from the dairy. It has not been drunk, not one drop of it, till you tasted it, sir, just now." The box of dates, though it was opened, contained its full complement of fruit. The honey was thick, and furred over with dust. The plate on which the biscuits lay was not covered with crumbs, as it should have been if any of them had been broken. Altogether, it seemed a safe conclusion that the dead man had starved in sight of plenty.

"I want to ask some questions, if I may," said Bredon, turning to the native. "My Company wishes to satisfy itself whether Mr. Jervison died by misadventure, or took his own life. You will not mind helping me?"

"I will tell you whatever you wish to know. I am sure you are a very just man."

"Look here, then—did Jervison often sleep here? And why did he want to sleep there that night—the night when you last saw him?"

"Never before, but that night he was trying a very special experiment, you do not understand these things here in the West. He was meaning to take a narcotic drug, one which he had prepared himself, which would set his soul free from his body. But because it is very dangerous to be disturbed from outside, while the soul is away from the body, he wanted to sleep here, where

nobody could disturb him, and we wheeled that bed in from the house. All this you will find written in his diary, he was very careful to do that, because, he said, if any harm came to him from the experiment, he wished it to be known that it was no fault of ours. I will show you the diary myself."

"Oh, he was drugged, was he, that first night? You don't think he may have taken an overdose of the drug, and died from that?"

The Indian smiled ever so slightly, and shrugged his shoulders. "But the doctor has told us that he starved to death. Your friend is a doctor also, he will tell you the same. No, I will tell you what I think. The prophet fasted very often, especially when he wished his soul to be free. And I think that when he woke up from his sleep he had had some revelation which made him want to go deeper into these mysteries, and therefore he fasted, only this time he fasted too long. He fasted perhaps till he fainted, and was too weak to reach his food, or to come out and find help. And we waited in the house, doing our own studies, while the prophet was dying in here. It was fated that it should be so."

Bredon was less interested in the theological bearings of the question than in its legal aspect. Is a man who starves himself without meaning to kill himself a suicide? Anyhow, that was for the lawyers. "Thank you," he said, "I will wait for my friend here; don't let me keep you." The Indian bowed, and left him—with some reluctance, Bredon thought. But he was determined to search this room thoroughly, he did not like the look of things. The lock on the door—no, that did not seem to have been tampered with, unless there were a second key. The walls? You do not make secret doors in a racquet-court. The windows? None, except those slats underneath the skylight, at the sides of the well, only just room for a man to put his hand in there, and that would be about forty feet up. Hang it all, the man had been alone for ten days, he had left the food untasted, and he had made no effort to get out. There was even a writing-tablet with a pencil tied to it, not far from the bed, he had meant, Bredon supposed, to write down his revelations on it as he woke from sleep, yet the dust stood on the top sheet, and the dead man had left no message. Could it really be madness? Or was the Indian right in his guess? Or was it even possible—one heard of strange tricks these Eastern jugglers played, was it possible that these four adepts had managed to tamper with the inside of the room without entering it?

And then Bredon noticed something on the floor which interested him, and when Simmonds came back with the little doctor they found him on all fours beside the bed, and the face he turned towards them as they came in was a very grave one, yet with a light in the eyes that suggested the anticipation of a victory.

"What a time you've been!" he said reproachfully.

"There's been a good deal in the way of alarms and excursions," explained Simmonds "Your friends the police have been round, and they've just taken off the whole Brotherhood in a suitably coloured Maria. Apparently they are known in Chicago. But I'm dashed if I see how they are going to fix anything on them over this business. The man starved to death. Don't talk to me about drugs, Bredon, there simply isn't any question of that."

"It's murder, though," said Bredon cheerfully "Look here!" And he pointed to the shiny tracks drawn across the oil-cloth by the movement of the bed's wheels "You see those tracks? They don't lead right up to the place where the bed stands, they stop about two inches short of it. And that means murder, and a dashed ingenious kind of murder too. By rights, the police oughtn't to be able to fix it on them, as you say. But that's the bother about a murder which takes four men to do it, one of them is certain to break down under examination, and give the others away. I was wondering, Dr Mayhew—when your friend Enstone left, did he take the fixtures away with him? The fixtures of this gymnasium, for example?"

"Sold the whole place, lock stock and barrel. He needed all the money he could get, and the Brotherhood weren't particular. There's a sort of shed at the back, you know, where Enstone used to keep odds and ends, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you found the parallel bars and what not tidied away in there. Were you thinking of giving us a gymnastic display? Because I should suggest some lunch first."

"I just thought I'd like to look at them, that's all. And then, as you say, lunch." Dr Mayhew's prophecy proved accurate. The shed at the back was plentifully littered with the appropriate debris. A vaulting-horse stood there, mutely reproachful at having been so long turned out to grass, the parallel bars were still shiny from youthful hands, the horizontal ladder, folded in three, was propped at an uneasy angle, and the floor was a network of ropes and rings. Bredon took up a rope at random and brought it out into the daylight. "You see," he said, passing his hands down it, "it's frayed all along. Boys don't fray ropes when they climb up them, they wear gym-shoes. Besides, the fraying is quite fresh, looks only a day or two old. Yes, that's what they did, and I suppose we had better tell the police about it. The Company stands to lose, of course, but I don't see what is to be done with the policy now, unless they erect a mausoleum over the Brotherhood with it. There won't be any more Brotherhood now, Dr Mayhew."

"You must excuse him," apologised Simmonds, "he is like this sometimes. I hate to say it, Bredon, but I haven't completely followed your train of thought. How did these fellows get at Jervison, when he was locked up in his gymnasium? You can't

kill a man by starvation, unless you shut him up without any food, or hold him down so that he can't get at it."

"You're wrong there," objected Bredon. "There are all sorts of ways. You can poison the food, and tell him it is poisoned. Not that that happened here, because I've tasted some of the milk myself, and here I am. Besides, I think a starving man would always risk it when it came to the point. You can hypnotize the man, in theory, and persuade him that the food isn't there, or that it isn't food at all. But that's only in theory, you never hear of a crime like that being pulled off in real life. No, the Indians had their alibi all right, when poor Jervison died."

"You mean they starved him somewhere else, and brought his body in here afterwards?"

"Hardly that. You see, it would be very much simpler to starve your man in here, and bring the food in afterwards to look as if he'd starved himself deliberately. But to do either of those things you must have access to the building. Do you happen to know, Dr. Mayhew, who it was that first found the body? And what sort of difficulty they had in making their way into the gymnasium?"

"The door was locked, and the key fixed on the inside. We had to take the lock off. I was one of the party myself. The police, of course, had charge of things, but the Indians had called me in as well, the moment they got the idea that something was wrong."

"Really? Now, that's very instructive. It shows how criminals always overdo these things. You or I, if a friend locked himself up and didn't appear for ten days, would shout through the keyhole and then send for a locksmith. Whereas these gentlemen sent off at once for a doctor and the police, as if they knew that both would be wanted. That's the worst of thinking that you've covered your tracks."

"My dear Bredon, we're still taking your word for it that it is murder. If it is, I should say the murderers covered their tracks quite remarkably well. It looks to me the clearest possible case of lunacy and suicide."

"You're wrong there. Did you notice that there was a writing-tablet and a pencil by the side of the bed? Now, what madman ever resisted the temptation to scrawl something on any odd piece of paper he came across? Especially if he thought he was being starved, or poisoned. That applies, too, if he were really making some fasting experiment, he would have left us a last message. And what did you make of the way the bed-clothes were piled on and round the bed? Nobody, mad or sane, wants to get out of bed that way."

"Well, tell us about it if you must. You may be mad or I may be mad, but I see no reason why either of us should starve, and we are keeping Dr. Mayhew from his lunch."

"Well, the outlines of the thing are simple. Jervison had picked up these rogues somewhere in America, and they were no more mystics than you or I are, they could talk the patter, that's all. They knew he was rich, and they stuck to him because they saw there was money to be made out of him. When they found he had made the Brotherhood his heirs, there remained nothing except to eliminate him, they went over the plan of the ground, and determined to make the fullest use of the weapons that lay ready to hand. Always a mistake to bring in weapons from outside, study your man's habits, and kill him along his own lines, so to speak. All they had to do was to encourage him in making these fool experiments, and to supply him with some ordinary kind of sleeping-draught which pretended to have a magical effect, probably it was they who suggested his retiring to the gymnasium, where he could be quiet, and they who insisted on wheeling his bed out into the middle of the room, telling him that he ought to catch the noonday sun, or some nonsense of that kind. Who ever heard of a man wanting to have his bed out in the middle of the room? It's human nature to want it next to the wall, though why, I've no idea."

"And then?"

"They waited, that night, till the sleeping-draught had taken its full effect, waited till it was early dawn, and they could see what was happening without being noticed by inquisitive neighbours. They tied ladders together, or more probably used that horizontal ladder, stretched out into a straight line, and climbed up on to the roof. All they took with them was ropes—the four ropes that used to hang from those hooks in the ceiling. They still had iron hooks on them, I dare say they tied handkerchiefs round the hooks, to prevent any noise. Through the skylight, they could look down on the sleeping man, between the iron slats they could let down the four ropes. The hooks acted as grapnels, and it did not take much fishing before they hooked the iron rails at the head and foot of the bed. Very quietly, very evenly, they pulled up the ropes, it was like a profane and ghastly parody of a scene you may remember in the Gospels. And still poor Jervison slept on, under the influence of his drug, dreaming, perhaps, that he was being levitated, and had at last got rid of the burden of the flesh. He nearly had.

"He slept on, and when he woke, he was 'hung up' forty feet in the air, still in his bed. The bed-clothes had been removed, it would not do to let him have a chance of climbing down. He hung there for over a week, and if his cries reached the outside world at all, they only reached the ears of four pitiless men, his murderers. Perhaps a braver man would have jumped for it, and preferred to end his life that way. But Jervison, you told me

yourself, Simmonds, was a coward about heights, he couldn't jump "

"And if he had?"

"He would have been found dead, either from his fall or from its effects. And the Indians would have told us, gravely enough, that the Prophet must have been making an experiment in levitation, or something of that kind. As it was, all they had to do was to come back when all was safely over, to let down the ropes again, to throw his bed-clothes in through the slats, falling where they would, and to take their ropes and ladder down again the way they had come. Only, as was natural, they did not bother to pay out the ropes quite evenly this time, and the bed came down in the wrong place, about two inches from where it had stood originally. So that it didn't fit in with the tracks across the oil-cloth, and it was that, somehow, which gave me a notion of what had happened. The bed, evidently, had been lifted, and you do not lift a wheeled bed unless you have a special purpose to be served, as these devils had. Jervison was a fool, but I hate to think of the way he died, and I am going to do my best to see these four fellows hanged. If I had my way with them, I would spare them the drop."

Ellery Queen

THE ADVENTURE OF THE AFRICAN TRAVELLER

By

ELLERY QUEEN

MR ELLERY QUEEN, wrapped loosely in English tweeds and reflections, proceeded—in a manner of speaking—with effort along the eighth-floor corridor of the Arst Building, that sumptuous citadel of the University. The tweeds were pure Bond Street, for Ellery was ever the sartorial fellow, whereas the reflections were Americanese, Ellery's ears being filled with the peculiar patois of young male and female collegians, and he himself having been Harvard, 'Teen.

This, he observed severely to himself as he lanced his way with the ferrule of his stick through a brigade of yelling students, was higher education in New York! He sighed, his silver eyes tender behind the lenses of his *pince-nez*, for, possessing that acute faculty of observation so essential to his business of studying criminal phenomena, he could not help but note the tea-rose complexions, the saucy eyes, and the osier figures of various female students in his path. His own Alma Mater, he reflected gloomily, paragon of the educational virtues that it was, might have been better, far better off had it besprinkled its muscular classes with nice-smelling co-eds like these—yes, indeed!

Shaking off these unprofessorial thoughts, Mr Ellery Queen edged gingerly through a battalion of giggling girls and approached Room 824, his destination, with dignity.

He halted. A tall and handsome and fawn-eyed young woman was leaning against the closed door, so obviously lying in wait for him that he began, under the buckling tweeds, to experience a—good lord!—a *trépidation*. Leaning, in fact, on the little placard which read

CRIMINOLOGY, APPLIED

MR QUEEN

This was, of course, sacrilege. The fawn-eyes looked up at him soulfully, with admiration, almost with reverence. What did

a member of the faculty do in such a predicament? Ellery wondered with a muted groan. Ignore the female person, speak to her firmly——?

The decision was wrested from his hands and, so to speak, placed on his arm. The brigand grasped his left biceps with devotional vigour and said in fluty tones: "You're Mr Ellery Queen, himself, aren't you?"

"I——"

"I *knew* you were. You've the nicest eyes. Such a queer colour. Oh, it's going to be *thrilling*, Mr Queen!"

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, I didn't say, did I?" The hand, which he observed with some astonishment was preposterously small, released his tingling biceps. She said sternly, as if in some way he had fallen in her estimation: "And you're the famous detective. Hmm. Another illusion blasted. Old Icky sent me, of course."

"Old Icky?"

"You don't know even that. Heavens! Old Icky is Professor Ickthorpe, B A, M A, Ph D, and goodness knows what else."

"Ah!" said Ellery. "I begin to understand."

"And high time, too," said the young woman severely. "Furthermore, Old Icky is my father, do you see." She became all at once very shy, or so Ellery reasoned, for the black lashes with their impossible sweep dropped suddenly to veil eyes of the ultimate brownness.

"I do see, Miss Ickthorpe." Ickthorpe! "I see all too clearly. Because Professor Ickthorpe—ah—inveigled me into giving this fantastic course, because you are Professor Ickthorpe's daughter, you think you may wheedle your way into my group. Fallacious reasoning," said Ellery, and planted his stick like a standard on the floor. "I think not. No."

Her slipper-toe joggled his stick unexpectedly, and he flailed wildly to keep from falling. "Do come off your perch, Mr Queen. There! That's settled. Shall we go in, Mr Queen? Such a nice name."

"But——"

"Icky has arranged things, bless him."

"I refuse abso——"

"The Bursar has been paid his filthy lucre. I have my B A, and I'm just dawdling about here working for my Master's. I'm really very intelligent. Oh, come on—don't be so professorish. You're much too nice a young man, and your *devastating* silv'ry eyes——"

"Oh, very well," said Ellery, suddenly pleased with himself. "Come along."

It was a small seminar room, containing a long table flanked with chairs. Two young men rose, rather respectfully, Ellery thought.

They seemed surprised but not too depressed at the vision of Miss Ickthorpe, who was evidently a notorious character. One of them bounded forward and pumped Ellery's hand.

"Mr. Queen! I'm Burrows, John Burrows. Decent of you to pick me and Crane out of that terrific bunch of would-be man-hunters." He was a nice young fellow, Ellery decided, with bright eyes and a thin intelligent face.

"Decent of your instructors and record, Burrows, I'd say. And you're Walter Crane, of course?"

The second young man shook Ellery's hand decorously, as if it were a rite, he was tall, broad, and studious-looking in a pleasant way. "I am, sir. Degree in chemistry. I'm really interested in what you and the Professor are attempting to do."

"Splendid. Miss Ickthorpe—rather unexpectedly—is to be the fourth member of our little group," said Ellery. "Rather unexpectedly! Well, let's sit down and talk this over."

Crane and Burrows flung themselves into chairs, and the young woman seated herself demurely. Ellery threw hat and stick into a corner, clasped his hands on the bare table, and looked at the white ceiling. One must begin.

"This is all rather nonsensical, you know, and yet there's something solid in it. Professor Ickthorpe came to me some time ago with an idea. He had heard of my modest achievements in solving crimes by pure analysis, and he thought it might be interesting to develop the faculty of detection by deduction in young university students. I wasn't so sure, having been a university student myself."

"We're rather on the brainy side these days," said Miss Ickthorpe.

"Hmm. That remains to be seen," said Ellery dryly. "I suppose it's against the rules, but I can't think without tobacco. You may smoke, gentlemen. A cigarette, Miss Ickthorpe?"

She accepted one absently, furnished her own match, and kept looking into Ellery's eyes. "Field work, of course?" asked Crane, the chemist.

"Precisely." Ellery sprang to his feet. "Miss Ickthorpe, *please* pay attention. If we're to do this at all, we must do it right.

Very well. We shall study crimes out of the current news—crimes, it goes without saying, which lend themselves to our particular brand of detection. We start from scratch, all of us—no preconceptions, understand. You will work under my direction, and we shall see what happens."

Burrows' keen face glowed. "Theory? I mean—won't you give us any principles of attack first—class-room lectures?"

"To hell with principles. I beg your pardon, Miss Ickthorpe. The only way to learn to swim, Burrows, is to get into the water. There were sixty-three applicants for this confounded

course I wanted only two or three—too many would defeat my purpose, unwieldy, you know I selected you, Crane, because you seem to have the analytical mind to a reasonable degree, and your scientific training has developed your sense of observation You, Burrows, have a sound academic background and, evidently an excellent top-piece” The two young men blushed “As for you, Miss Ickthorpe,” continued Ellery stiffly, “you selected yourself, so you’ll have to take the consequences Old Icky, or no Old Icky, at the first sign of stupidity out you go”

“An Ickthorpe, sir, is never stupid”

“I hope—I sincerely hope—not. Now, to cases An hour ago, before I set out for the University, a flash come in over the Police Headquarters’ wire Most fortuitously, I thought, and we must be properly grateful . Murder in the theatrical district—chap by the name of Spargo is the victim A queer enough affair, I gathered, from the sketchy facts given over the tape I’ve asked my father—Inspector Queen, you know—to leave the scene of the crime exactly as found We go there at once”

“Bully!” cried Burrows “To grips with crime! This is going to be great. Shan’t we have any trouble getting in, Mr Queen?”

“None at all I’ve arranged for each of you gentlemen to carry a special police pass, like my own, I’ll get one for you later, Miss Ickthorpe. Let me caution all of you to refrain from taking anything away from the scene of the crime—at least without consulting me first And on no account allow yourselves to be pumped by reporters”

“A murder,” said Miss Ickthorpe thoughtfully, with a sudden dampening of spirits

“Aha! Squeamish already Well, this affair will be a test-case for all of you I want to see how your minds work in contact with the real thing . . Miss Ickthorpe, have you a hat or something?”

“Sir?”

“Duds, duds! You can traipse in there this way, you know!”

“Oh!” she murmured, blushing “Isn’t a sports dress *au fait* at murders?” Ellery glared, and she added sweetly “In my locker down the hall, Mr Queen I shan’t be a moment”

Ellery jammed his hat on his head “I shall meet the three of you in front of the Arts Building in five minutes Five minutes, Miss Ickthorpe!” And, retrieving his stick, he stalked like any professor from the seminar room All the way down the elevator, through the main corridor, on the marble steps outside, he breathed deeply A remarkable day! he observed to the campus A really remarkable day

The Fenwick Hotel lay a few hundred yards from Times Square Its lobby was boiling with policemen, detectives, reporters and, from their universal appearance of apprehension, guests Moun-

tainous Sergeant Velie, Inspector Queen's right-hand man, was planted at the door, a cement barrier against curiosity-seekers. By his side stood a tall, worried-looking man dressed sombrely in a blue serge suit, white linen, and black bow-tie.

"Mr Williams, the hotel manager," said the Sergeant.

Williams shook hands. "Can't understand it. Terrible mess. You're with the police?"

Ellery nodded. His charges surrounded him like a royal guard—a rather timid royal guard, to be sure, for they pressed close to him as if for protection. There was something sinister in the atmosphere. Even the hotel clerks and attendants, uniformly dressed in grey suits, ties, shirts—wore strained expressions, like stewards on a foundering ship.

"Nobody in or out, Mr Queen," growled Sergeant Velie. "Inspector's orders. You're the first since the body was found. These people okay?"

"Yes. Dad's on the scene?"

"Upstairs, third floor, Room 317. Mostly quiet now."

Ellery levelled his stick. "Come along, young 'uns. And don't"—he added gently—"don't be so nervous. You'll become accustomed to this sort of thing. Keep your heads up."

They bobbed in unison, their eyes a little glassy. As they ascended in a policed elevator, Ellery observed that Miss Ickthorpe was trying very hard to appear professionally *blasée*. Ickthorpe indeed! This should take the starch out of her. They walked down a hushed corridor to an open door. Inspector Queen, a small bird-like grey little man with sharp eyes remarkably like his son's, met them in the doorway.

Ellery, suppressing a snicker at the convulsive start of Miss Ickthorpe, who had darted one fearful glance into the death-room and then gasped for dear life, introduced the young people to the Inspector, shut the door behind his somewhat reluctant charges, and looked about the bedroom.

Lying on the drab carpet, arms outflung before him like a diver, lay a dead man. His head presented a curious appearance as if some one had upset a bucket of thick red paint over him, clotting the brown hair and gushing over his shoulders. Miss Ickthorpe gave vent to a faint gurgle which certainly was not appreciation. Ellery observed with morbid satisfaction that her tiny hands were clenched and that her elfin face was whiter than the bed near which the dead man lay sprawled. Crane and Burrows were breathing hard.

"Miss Ickthorpe, Mr Crane, Mr Burrows—your first corpse," said Ellery briskly. "Now, dad, to work. How does it stand?"

Inspector Queen sighed. "Name is Oliver Spargo. Forty-two, separated from his wife two years ago. Mercantile traveller for a

big dry goods exporting house Returned from South Africa after a year's stay Bad reputation with the natives in the outlying settlements—thrashed them, cheated them, in fact, was driven out of British Africa by a scandal It was in the New York papers not long ago Registered at the Fenwick here for three days—same floor, by the way—then checked out to go to Chicago Visiting relatives” The Inspector grunted, as if this were something justifiably punished by homicide “Returned to New York this morning by plane Checked in at 9 30 Didn't leave this room At 11 30 he was found dead, just as you see him, by the coloured maid on this floor, Agatha Robins”

“Leads?”

The old man shrugged “Maybe—maybe not We've looked this bird up Pretty hard guy, from the reports, but sociable No enemies, apparently, all his movements since his boat docked innocent and accounted for And a lady-killer Chucked his wife over before his last trip across, and took to his bosom a nice blonde gal Fussed with her for a couple of months and then skipped out—and *didn't* take her with him We've had both women on the pan”

“Suspects?”

Inspector Queen stared moodily at the dead traveller “Well, take your pick He had one visitor this morning—the blonde lady I just mentioned Name of Jane Terrill—no sign of occupation Huh! She evidently read in the ship's news of Spargo's arrival two weeks ago, hunted him up, and a week ago, while Spargo was in Chicago, called at the desk downstairs inquiring for him She was told he was expected back this morning—he'd left word She came in at 11 05 this a m, was given his room-number, was taken up by the elevator-boy Nobody remembers her leaving But she says she knocked and there was no answer, so she went away and hasn't been back since Never saw him—according to her story”

Miss Ickthorpe skirted the corpse with painful care, perched herself on the edge of the bed, opened her bag and began to powder her nose “And the wife, Inspector Queen?” she murmured Something sparkled in the depths of her fawn-brown eyes Miss Ickthorpe, it was evident, had an idea and was taking heroic measures to suppress it

“The wife?” snorted the Inspector “God knows She and Spargo separated, as I said, and she claims she didn't even know he'd come back from Africa Says she was window-shopping this morning”

It was a small featureless hotel room, containing a bed, a wardrobe closet, a bureau, a night-table, a desk, and a chair A dummy fireplace with a gas-log, an open door which led to a bathroom—nothing more

Ellery dropped to his knees beside the body, Crane and Burrows trooping after with set faces. The Inspector sat down and watched with a humourless grin. Ellery turned the body over, his hands explored the rigid members, stiff in *rigor mortis*.

"Crane, Burrows, Miss Ickthorpe," he said sharply. "Might as well begin now. Tell me what you see—Miss Ickthorpe, you first." She jumped from the bed and ran around the dead man, he felt her hot unsteady breath on the back of his neck. "Well, well? Don't you see *anything*? Good lord, there's enough here, I should think."

Miss Ickthorpe licked her red lips and said in a strangled voice: "He's dressed in lounging-robe, carpet-slippers and—yes, silk underwear beneath."

"Yes. And black silk socks and garters. And the robe and underwear bear the dealer's label *Johnson's, Johannesburg, U S Afr*. What else?"

"A wrist-watch on his left wrist. I think"—she leaned over and with the shrinking tip of a finger nudged the dead arm—"yes, the watch crystal is cracked. Why, it's set at 10 20!"

"Good," said Ellery in a soft voice. "Dad, did Prouty examine the cadaver?"

"Yes," said the Inspector in a resigned voice. "Spargo died some time between 11 00 and 11 30, Doc says. I figure——"

Miss Ickthorpe's eyes were shining. "Doesn't that mean——?"

"Now, now, Miss Ickthorpe, if you have an idea keep it to yourself. Don't leap at conclusions. That's enough for you. Well, Crane?"

The young chemist's brow was ridged. He pointed to the watch, a large gaudy affair with a leather wrist-strap. "Man's watch. Concussion of fall stopped the works. Crease in leather strap at the second hole, where the prong now fits, but there's also a crease, a deeper one, at the third hole."

"That's really excellent, Crane. And?"

"Left hand spattered and splashed with dried blood. Left palm also shows stain, but fainter, as if he had grabbed something with his bloody hand and wiped most of the blood off. There ought to be something around here showing a red smudge from his clutching hand."

"Crane, I'm proud of you. Was anything found with a blood-smear on it, dad?"

The Inspector looked interested. "Good work, youngster. No, El, nothing at all. Not even a smear on the rug. Must be something the murderer took away."

"Now, Inspector," chuckled Ellery, "this isn't *your* examination. Burrows, can you add anything?"

Young Burrows swallowed rapidly. "Wounds on the head show

he was struck with a heavy instrument many times. Disarranged rug probably indicates a struggle. And the face——”

“Ah! So you’ve noticed the face, eh? What about the face?”

“Freshly shaved. Talcum powder still on cheeks and chin. Don’t you think we ought to examine the bathroom, Mr. Queen?”

Miss Ickthorpe said peevishly. “I noticed that, too, but you didn’t give me a chance. The powder *is* smoothly applied, isn’t it? No streaks, no heavy spots.”

Ellery sprang to his feet. “You’ll be Sherlock Holmeses yet. The weapon, dad?”

“A heavy stone hammer, crudely made—some kind of African curio, our expert says. Spargo must have had it in his bag—his trunk hasn’t arrived yet from Chicago.”

Ellery nodded, on the bed lay an open pigskin travelling-bag. Beside it, neatly laid out, was an evening outfit, tuxedo coat, trousers, and vest, stiff-bosomed shirt, studs and cuff-links, a clean wing-collar; black suspenders; a white silk handkerchief. Under the bed were two pairs of black shoes, one pair brogues, the other patent-leather. Ellery looked around; something, it seemed, disturbed him. On the chair near the bed lay a soiled shirt, a soiled pair of socks, and a soiled suit of underwear. None exhibited blood-stains. He paused thoughtfully.

“We took the hammer away. It was full of blood and hair,” continued the Inspector. “No fingerprints anywhere. Handle anything you want—everything’s been photographed and tested for prints.”

Ellery began to puff at a cigarette. He noticed that Burrows and Crane were crouched over the dead man, occupied with the watch. He sauntered over, Miss Ickthorpe at his heels.

Burrows’ thin face was shining as he looked up. “Here’s something!” He had carefully removed the timepiece from Spargo’s wrist and had pried open the back of the case. Ellery saw a roughly circular patch of fuzzy white paper glued to the inside of the case, as if something had been rather unsuccessfully torn away. Burrows leaped to his feet. “That gives *me* an idea,” he announced. “Yes, sir.” He studied the dead man’s face intently.

“And you, Crane?” asked Ellery with interest. The young chemist had produced a small magnifying-glass from his pocket and was scrutinising the watchworks.

Crane rose. “I’d rather not say now,” he mumbled. “Mr. Queen, I’d like permission to take this watch to my laboratory.”

Ellery looked at his father, the old man nodded. “Certainly, Crane. But be sure you return it. Dad, you searched this room thoroughly, fireplace and all?”

The Inspector cackled suddenly. “I was wondering when you’d get to that. There’s something almighty interesting in that fire-

place " His face fell and rather grumpily he produced a snuff-box and pinched some crumbs into his nostrils " Although I'll be hanged if I know what it means "

Ellery squinted at the fireplace, his lean shoulders squaring, the others crowded around He squinted again, and knelt, behind the manufactured gas-log, in a tiny grate, there was a heap of ashes Curious ashes indeed, patently not of wood, coal, or paper Ellery poked about in the débris—and sucked in his breath In a moment he had dug out of the ashes ten peculiar objects eight flat pearl buttons and two metal things, one triangular in outline, eye-like, the other hook-like—both small and made of some cheap alloy Two of the eight buttons were slightly larger than the rest The buttons were ridged, and in the depression in each centre were four thread-holes All ten objects were charred by fire

" And what do you make of that? " demanded the Inspector

Ellery juggled the buttons thoughtfully He did not reply directly Instead, he said to his three pupils, in a grim voice " You might think about these Dad, when was this fireplace last cleaned? "

" Early this morning by Agatha Robins, the mulatto maid Some one checked out of this room at seven o'clock, and she cleaned up the place before Spargo got here Fireplace was clean this morning, she says "

Ellery dropped buttons and metal objects on the night-table and went to the bed He looked into the open travelling-bag, its interior was in a state of confusion The bag contained three four-in-hand neckties, two clean white shirts, socks, underwear, and handkerchiefs All the haberdashery, he noted, bore the same dealer's tab—*Johnson's, Johannesburg, U S Afr* He seemed pleased, and proceeded to the wardrobe closet It contained merely a tweed travelling suit, a brown topcoat, and a felt hat

He closed the door with a satisfied bang " You've observed everything? " he asked the two young men and the girl

Crane and Burrows nodded, rather doubtfully Miss Ickthorpe was barely listening, from the rapt expression on her face, she might have been listening to the music of the spheres

" Miss Ickthorpe! "

Miss Ickthorpe smiled dreamily " Yes, Mr Queen, " she said in a submissive little voice Her brown eyes began to rove

Ellery grunted and strode to the bureau Its top was bare He went through the drawers, they were empty He started for the desk, but the Inspector said " Nothing there, son He hadn't time to stow anything away Except for the bathroom, you've seen everything "

As if she had been awaiting the signal, Miss Ickthorpe dashed for

the bathroom. She seemed very anxious indeed to explore its interior. Crane and Burrows hurried after her.

Ellery permitted them to examine the bathroom before him. Miss Ickthorpe's hands flew over the objects on the rim of the washbowl. There was a pigskin toilet-kit, open, draped over the marble, an uncleansed razor, a still damp shaving-brush, a tube of shaving cream, a small can of talcum and a tube of tooth-paste. To one side lay a celluloid shaving-brush container, its cap on the open kit.

"Can't see a thing of interest here," said Burrows frankly. "You, Walter?"

Crane shook his head. "Except that he must have just finished shaving before he was murdered, not a thing."

Miss Ickthorpe wore a stern and faintly exultant look. "That's because, like all men, you're blinder'n bats. *I've* seen enough."

They trooped by Ellery, rejoining the Inspector, who was talking with some one in the bedroom. Ellery chuckled to himself. He lifted the lid of a clothes-hamper, it was empty. Then he picked up the cap of the shaving-brush container. The cap came apart in his fingers, and he saw that a small circular pad fitted snugly inside. He chuckled again, cast a derisive glance at the triumphant back of the heroic Miss Ickthorpe outside, replaced cap and tube, and went back into the bedroom.

He found Williams, the hotel manager, accompanied by a policeman, talking heatedly to the Inspector. "We can't keep this up for ever, Inspector Queen," Williams was saying. "Our guests are beginning to complain. The night-shift is due to go on soon, I've got to go home myself, and you're making us stay here all night, by George. After all——"

The old man said "Pish!" and cocked an inquiring eye at his son. Ellery nodded. "Can't see any reason for not lifting the ban, dad. We've learned as much as we can. You young people!" Three pairs of eager eyes focused on him, they were like three puppies on a leash. "Have you seen enough?" They nodded solemnly. "Anything else you want to know?"

Burrows said quickly. "I want a certain address."

Miss Ickthorpe paled. "Why, so do I! John, you mean thing!"

And Crane muttered, clutching Spargo's watch in his fist. "I want something, too—but I'll find it out right in this hotel!"

Ellery smoothed away a smile, shrugged, and said. "See Sergeant Velie downstairs—that Colossus we met at the door. He'll tell you anything you may want to know."

"Now, follow instructions. It's evident that the three of you have definite theories. I'll give you two hours in which to formulate them and pursue any investigations you may have in mind." He consulted his watch. "At 6:30, meet me at my apartment on West

Eighty-seventh Street, and I'll try to rip your theories apart Happy hunting!"

He grinned dismissal They scrambled for the door, Miss Ickthorpe's turban slightly awry, her elbows working vigorously to clear the way

"And now," said Ellery in a totally different voice when they had disappeared down the corridor, "come here a moment, dad I want to talk to you alone"

At 6 30 that evening Mr Ellery Queen presided at his own table, watching three young faces bursting with sternly repressed news The remains of a dinner, barely touched, strewed the cloth

Miss Ickthorpe had somehow contrived, in the interval between her dismissal and her appearance at the Queens' apartment, to change her gown, she was now attired in something lack and soft, which set off—as she obviously was aware—the whiteness of her throat, the brownness of her eyes, and the pinkness of her cheeks The young men were preoccupied with their coffee-cups

"Now, class," chuckled Ellery, "recitations" They brightened, sat straighter and moistened their lips "You've had, each of you, about two hours in which to crystallise the results of your first investigation Whatever happens, I can't take credit, since so far I've taught you nothing But by the end of this little confabulation I'll have a rough idea of just what material I'm working with"

"Yes, sir," said Miss Ickthorpe

"John—we may as well discard formality—what's *your* theory?"

Burrows said slowly "I've more than a theory, Mr Queen I've the solution!"

"A solution, John Don't be too cocky And what," said Ellery, "is this solution of yours?"

Burrows drew a breath from the depths of his boots "The clue that led to my solution was Spargo's wrist-watch" Crane and the girl started Ellery blew smoke and said, encouragingly "Go on"

"The two creases on the leather strap," replied Burrows, "were significant As Spargo wore the watch, the prong was caught in the second hole, so that there was a crease *across* the second hole Yet a deeper crease appeared across the *third* hole Conclusion the watch was habitually worn by a person with a smaller wrist In other words, the watch was not Spargo's!"

"Bravo," said Ellery softly "Bravo"

"Why, then, was Spargo wearing some one else's watch? For a very good reason, I maintain The doctor had said Spargo died between 11 0 and 11 30 Yet the watch-hands had apparently stopped at 10 20 The answer to this discrepancy? That the murderer, finding no watch on Spargo, took her own watch, cracked the crystal

and stopped the works, then set the hands at 10 20 and strapped it about Spargo's dead wrist. This would seem to establish the time of death as 10 20 and would give the murderer an opportunity to provide an alibi for that time, when all the while the murder actually occurred about 11 20. How's that?"

Miss Ickthorpe said tartly "You say 'her' But it's a man's watch, John—you forget that"

Burrows grinned "A woman can own a man's watch, can't she? Now whose watch was it? Easy In the back of the case there was a circular patch of fuzzy paper, as if something had been ripped out. What, made of paper, is usually pasted in the back of a watch? A photograph. Why was it taken out? Obviously, because the murderer's face was in that photograph. In the last two hours I followed this lead. I visited my suspect on a reportorial pretext and managed to get a look at a photograph-album she has. There I found one photograph with a circular patch cut out. From the rest of the photo it was clear that the missing circle contained the heads of a man and a woman. My case was complete!"

"Perfectly amazing," murmured Ellery "And this murderess of yours is——?"

"Spargo's wife! Motive—hate, or revenge, or thwarted love, or something"

Miss Ickthorpe sniffed, and Crane shook his head "Well," said Ellery, "we seem to be in disagreement. Nevertheless a very interesting analysis, John. . . Walter, what's yours?"

Crane hunched his broad shoulders "I agree with Johnny that the watch did not belong to Spargo, that the murderer set the hands at 10 20 to provide an alibi, but I disagree as to the identity of the criminal. I also worked on the watch as the main clue. But with a vastly different approach

"Look here" He brought out the gaudy timepiece and tapped its cracked crystal deliberately "Here's something you people may not know. Watches, so to speak, breathe. That is, contact with warm flesh causes the air inside to expand and force its way out through the minute cracks and holes of the case and crystal. When the watch is laid aside, the air cools and contracts, and dust-bearing air is sucked into the interior."

"I always said I should have studied science," said Ellery "That's a new trick, Walter. Continue"

"To put it specifically, a baker's watch will be found to contain flour-dust. A bricklayer's watch will collect brick-dust." Crane's voice rose triumphantly "D'you know what I found in this watch? Tiny particles of a woman's face-powder!"

Miss Ickthorpe frowned. Crane continued in a deep voice "And a very special kind of face-powder it is, Mr. Queen. Kind used only by women of certain complexions. What complexions?"

Negro brown! The powder came from a mulatto woman's purse! I've questioned her, checked her vanity-case, and although she denies it, I say that Spargo's murderess is Agatha Robins, the mulatto maid who 'found' the body!"

Ellery whistled gently "Good work, Walter, splendid work And of course from your standpoint she would deny being the owner of the watch anyway That clears something up for *me* But motive?"

Crane looked uncomfortable "Well, I know it sounds fantastic, but a sort of voodoo vengeance—reversion to racial type—Spargo had been cruel to African natives . . . it was in the papers"

Ellery shaded his eyes to conceal their twinkle Then he turned to Miss Ickthorpe, who was tapping her cup nervously, squirming in her chair, and exhibiting other signs of impatience "And now," he said, "we come to the star recitation What have you to offer, Miss Ickthorpe? You've been simply saturated with a theory all afternoon Out with it"

She compressed her lips "You boys think you're clever You, too, Mr Queen—you especially Oh, I'll admit John and Walter have shown superficial traces of intelligence"

"Will you be explicit, Miss Ickthorpe?"

She tossed her head "Very well The watch had nothing to do with the crime at all!"

The boys gaped, and Ellery tapped his palms gently together "Very good I agree with you Explain, please"

Her brown eyes burned, and her cheeks were very pink "Simple!" she said with a sniff "Spargo had arrived from Chicago only two hours before his murder He had been in Chicago for a week and a half Then for a week and a half he had been living *by Chicago time* And, since Chicago time is *one hour earlier* than New York time, it merely means that *nobody* set the hands back, that they were standing at 10 20 when he fell dead, because he'd neglected to set his watch ahead on arriving in New York this morning!"

Crane muttered something in his throat, and Burrows flushed a deep crimson Ellery looked sad "I'm afraid the laurels so far go to Miss Ickthorpe, gentlemen That happens to be correct Anything else?"

"Naturally I know the murderer, and it isn't Spargo's wife or that outlandish mulatto maid," she said exasperatingly "Follow me Oh, this is so easy! We all saw that the powder on Spargo's dead face had been applied very smoothly. From the condition of his cheeks and the shaving things in the bathroom it was evident that he'd shaved just before being murdered But how does a man apply powder after shaving? How do *you* powder your face, Mr Queen?" she shot at him rather tenderly

Ellery looked startled "With my fingers, of course" Crane and Burrows nodded

"Exactly!" chortled Miss Ickthorpe "And what happens? I know, because I'm a very observant person and, besides, Old Icky shaves every morning and I can't *help* noticing when he kisses me good-morning Applied with the fingers on cheeks still slightly moist, the powder goes on in streaks, smudgy, heavier in some spots than others But look at *my* face!" They looked, with varying expressions of appreciation "You don't see powder streaks on *my* face, do you? Of course not! And why? Because I'm a woman, and a woman uses a powder-puff, and there isn't a single powder-puff in Spargo's bedroom or bathroom!"

Ellery smiled—almost with relief "Then you suggest, Miss Ickthorpe, that the last person with Spargo, presumably his murderess, was a woman who watched him shave and then, with endearment, perhaps, took out her own powder-puff and dabbed it over his face—only to bash him over the head with the stone hammer a few minutes later?"

"Well—yes, although I didn't think of it *that* way But—yes! And psychology points to the specific woman, too, Mr Queen A man's wife would never think of such an—an amorous proceeding But a man's mistress would, and I say that Spargo's lady-love, Jane Terrill, whom I visited only an hour ago, and who denies having powdered Spargo's face—she would!—killed him"

Ellery sighed He rose and twitched his cigarette-stub into the fireplace They were watching him, and each other, with expectancy "Aside," he began, "from complimenting you, Miss Ickthorpe, on the acuteness of your knowledge of mistresses"—she uttered an outraged little gasp—"I want to say this before going ahead The three of you have proved very ingenious, very alert, I'm more pleased than I can say I do think we're going to have a cracking good class Good work, all of you!"

"But, Mr Queen," protested Burrows, "which one of us is right? Each one of us has given a different solution"

Ellery waved his hand "Right? A detail, theoretically The point is you've done splendid work—sharp observation, a rudimentary but promising linking of cause and effect As for the case itself, I regret to say—you're all wrong!"

Miss Ickthorpe clenched her tiny fist "I *knew* you'd say that! I think you're horrid And I *still* think I'm right"

"There, gentlemen, is an extraordinary example of feminine psychology," grinned Ellery "Now attend, all of you"

"You're all wrong for the simple reason that each of you has taken just one line of attack, one clue, one chain of reasoning, and completely ignored the other elements of the problem You, John,

say it's Spargo's wife, merely because her photograph-album contains a picture from which a circular patch with two heads has been cut away. That this might have been sheer coincidence apparently never occurred to you.

"You, Walter, came nearer the truth when you satisfactorily established the ownership of the watch as the mulatto maid's. But suppose Maid Robins had accidentally dropped the watch in Spargo's room at the hotel during his first visit there, and he had found it and taken it to Chicago with him? That's what probably happened. The mere fact that he wore her watch doesn't make her his murderess.

"You, Miss Ickthorpe, explained away the watch business with the difference-in-time element, but you overlooked an important item. Your entire solution depends on the presence in Spargo's room of a powder-puff. Willing to believe that no puff remained on the scene of the crime, because it suited your theory, you made a cursory search and promptly concluded no puff was there. But a puff *is* there! Had you investigated the cap of the celluloid tube in which Spargo kept his shaving-brush, you would have found a circular pad of powder-puff which toilet-article manufacturers in this effeminate age provide for men's travelling-kits."

Miss Ickthorpe said nothing, she seemed actually embarrassed.

"Now for the proper solution," said Ellery, mercifully looking away. "All three of you, amazingly enough, postulate a woman as the criminal. Yet it was apparent to me, after my examination of the premises, that the murderer *must have been a man*."

"A man!" they echoed in chorus.

"Exactly. Why did none of you consider the significance of those eight buttons and the two metal clips?" He smiled. "Probably because again they didn't fit your preconceived theories. But *everything* must fit in a solution. Enough of scolding. You'll do better next time.

"Six small pearl buttons, flat, and two slightly larger ones, found in a heap of ashes distinctly not of wood, coal, or paper. There is only one common article which possesses these characteristics—a man's shirt. A man's shirt, the six buttons from the front, the two larger ones from the cuffs, the débris from the linen or broadcloth. Some one, then, had burned a man's shirt in the grate, forgetting that the buttons would not be consumed.

"The metal objects, like a large hook and eye? A shirt suggests haberdashery, the hook and eye suggest only one thing—one of the cheap bow-ties which are purchased ready-tied, so that you do not have to make the bow yourself."

They were watching his lips like kindergarten children. "You, Crane, observed that Spargo's bloody left hand had clutched something, most of the blood coming off the palm. But nothing

smudged with blood had been found . . . Inference: In the struggle with the murderer, after he had already been hit on the head and was streaming blood, Spargo had clutched his assailant's collar and tie, staining them. Borne out too by the signs of struggle in the room

"Spargo dead, his own collar and tie wet with blood, what could the murderer do? Let me attack it this way. The murderer must have been from one of three classes of people—a rank outsider, or a guest at the hotel, or an employee of the hotel. What had he done? He had burned his shirt and tie. But if he had been an outsider, he could have turned up his coat-collar, concealing the stains long enough to get out of the hotel—no necessity, then, to burn shirt and tie when time was precious. Were he one of the hotel guests, he could have done the same thing while he went to his own room. Then he must have been an employee.

"Confirmation? Yes. As an employee he would be forced to remain in the hotel, on duty, constantly being seen. What could he do? Well, he had to change his shirt and tie. Spargo's bag was open—shirt inside. He rummaged through—you saw the confusion in the bag—and changed. Leave his shirt? No, it might be traced to him. So, boys and girls, burning was inevitable.

"The tie? You recall that, while Spargo had laid out his evening-clothes on the bed, there was no bow-tie there, in the bag, or anywhere else in the room. Obviously, then, the murderer took the bow-tie of the tuxedo outfit, and burned his own bow-tie with the shirt."

Miss Ickthorpe sighed, and Crane and Burrows shook their heads a little dazedly. "I knew, then, that the murderer was an employee of the hotel, a man, and that he was wearing Spargo's shirt and black or white bow-tie, probably black. But all the employees of the hotel wear grey shirts and grey ties, as we observed on entering the Fenwick. Except"—Ellery inhaled the smoke of his cigarette—"except one man. Surely you noticed the difference in his attire?"

And so, when you left on your various errands, I suggested to my father that this man be examined—he seemed the best possibility. And, sure enough, we found on him a shirt and bow-tie bearing Johannesburg labels like those we had observed on Spargo's other haberdashery. I knew we should find this proof, for Spargo had spent a whole year in South Africa, and, since most of his clothes had been purchased there, it was reasonable to expect that the stolen shirt and tie had been, too."

"Then the case was finished when we were just beginning," said Burrows ruefully.

"But—who?" demanded Crane in bewilderment.

Ellery blew a great cloud. "We got a confession out of him in three minutes. Spargo, that gentle creature, had years before stolen

this man's wife, and then thrown her over When Spargo registered at the Fenwick two weeks ago, this man recognised him and decided to revenge himself He's at the Tombs right now—Williams, the hotel manager!"

There was a little silence Burrows bobbed his head back and forth "We've got a lot to learn," he said "I can see that"

"Check," muttered Crane "I'm going to like this course"

Ellery pshaw-pshawed Nevertheless, he turned to Miss Ickthorpe who by all precedent should be moved to contribute to the general spirit of approbation But Miss Ickthorpe's thoughts were far away "Do you know," she said, her brown eyes misty, "you've never asked me my first name, Mr Queen?"

ONE TOO MANY

By

DOROTHY L SAYERS

WHEN SIMON GRANT, the Napoleon of Consolidated Nitro-Phosphates and Heavens knows how many affiliated companies, vanished off the face of the earth one rainy November night, it would have been, in any case, only natural that his family and friends should be disturbed, and that there should be a slight flurry on the Stock Exchange. But when, in the course of the next few days, it became painfully evident that Consolidated Nitro-Phosphates had been consolidated in nothing but the name—that they were, in fact, not even ripe for liquidation, but had (so to speak) already passed that point and evaporated into thin air, such assets as they possessed having mysteriously disappeared at the same time as Simon Grant—then the hue-and-cry went out with a noise that shook three continents and, incidentally, jogged Mr Montague Egg for an hour or so out of his blameless routine.

Not that Mr Egg had any money in Nitro-Phosphates, or could claim any sort of acquaintance with the missing financier. His connection with the case was entirely fortuitous, the by-product of a savage budgetary announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which threatened to have alarming results for the wine and spirits trade. Mr Egg, travelling representative of Messrs Plummet & Rose of Piccadilly, had reached Birmingham in his wanderings, when he was urgently summoned back to town by his employers for a special conference upon policy, and thus—though he did not know it at the time—he enjoyed the distinction of travelling by the very train from which Simon Grant so suddenly and unaccountably vanished.

The facts in the case of Simon Grant were disconcertingly simple. At this time the L M S Railway were running a night express from Birmingham to London which, leaving Birmingham at 9.5, stopped only at Coventry and Rugby before running into Euston at 12.10. Mr Grant had attended a dinner given in his honour by certain prominent business men in Coventry, and after dinner he had had the unblushing effrontery to make a speech about the Prosperity of British Business. After this, he had hastened away to take the Birmingham express as far as Rugby, where he was engaged to

stay the night with that pillar of financial rectitude, Lord Buddlethorp. He was seen into a first-class carriage at 9.57 by two eminently respectable Coventry magnates, who had remained chatting with him till the train started. There was one other person in his carriage—no less a man, in fact, than Sir Hicklebury Bowles, the well-known sporting baronet. In the course of conversation, he had mentioned to Sir Hicklebury (whom he knew slightly) that he was travelling alone, his secretary having succumbed to an attack of influenza. About half-way between Coventry and Rugby, Mr Grant had gone out into the corridor, muttering something about the heat. He had never been seen again.

At first, a very sinister light had been thrown on the incident by the fact that a door in the corridor, a little way up the train, had been found swinging open at Rugby, and the subsequent discovery of Mr Grant's hat and overcoat a few miles farther up the line had led everybody to fear the worst. Careful examination, however, failed to produce either Simon Grant's corpse or any evidence of any heavy body having fallen from the train. In a pocket of the overcoat was a first-class ticket from Coventry to Rugby, and it seemed clear that, without this, he could not have passed the barrier at Rugby. Moreover, Lord Buddlethorp had sent his car with a chauffeur and a footman to meet the train at Rugby. The chauffeur had stood at the barrier and the footman had paraded the platform in search of the financier. Both knew him very well by sight, and between them they asserted positively that he had never left the train. Nobody had arrived at the barrier ticketless, or with the wrong ticket, and a check-up of the tickets issued for Rugby at Birmingham and Coventry revealed no discrepancy.

There remained two possibilities, both tempting and plausible. The Birmingham-London express reached Rugby at 10.24, departing again at 10.28. But, swift and impressive as it was, it was not the only, or the most important, pebble on the station beach, for over against it upon the down line was the Irish Mail, snorting and blowing in its three-minute halt before it roared away northwards at 10.25. If the express had been on time, Simon Grant might have slipped across and boarded it, and been at Holyhead by 2.25 to catch the steamer, and be in Dublin by 6.35, and Heaven only knew where a few hours after. As for the confident assertion of Lord Buddlethorp's footman, a trifling disguise—easily assumed in a lavatory or an empty compartment—would be amply sufficient to deceive him. To Chief Inspector Peacock, in charge of the investigations, the possibility appeared highly probable. It had also the advantage that the passengers crossing by the mail-boat could be readily reckoned up and accounted for.

The question of tickets now became matter for inquiry. It was not likely that Simon Grant would have tried to secure them during his hasty one-minute dash for the Mail. Either he had taken them beforehand, or some accomplice had met him at Rugby and handed them over. Chief Inspector Peacock was elated when he discovered that tickets covering the train-and-steamer route from Rugby to Dublin had actually been purchased for the night in question from the L M S agents in London in the absurd and incredible name of Solomon Grundy. Mr Peacock was well acquainted with the feeble cunning which prompts people, when adopting an alias, to cling to their own initials. The underlying motive is, no doubt, a dread lest those same initials, inscribed on a watch, cigarette-case or what-not, should arouse suspicion, but the tendency is so well known that the choice of initials arouses in itself the very suspicion it is intended to allay. Mr Peacock's hopes rose very high indeed when he discovered, in addition, that Solomon Grundy (Great Heavens, what a name!) had gone out of his way to give a fictitious and, indeed, nonexistent address to the man at the ticket-office. And then, just when the prospects seemed at its brightest, the whole theory received its death-blow. Not only had no Mr Solomon Grundy travelled by the mail-boat that night or any night—not only had his ticket never been presented or even cancelled—but it turned out to be impossible that Mr Simon Grant should have boarded the Irish Mail at all. For some tedious and infuriating reason connected with an over-heated axle-box, the Birmingham-London express, on that night of all nights, had steamed into Rugby three minutes behind time and two minutes after the departure of the Mail. If this had been Simon Grant's plan of escape, something had undoubtedly gone wrong with it.

And, that being so, Chief Inspector Peacock came back to the old question. What had become of Simon Grant?

Talking it over with his colleagues, the Chief Inspector came eventually to the conclusion that Grant had, in fact, intended to take the Irish Mail, leaving the open door and the scattered garments behind him by way of confusing the trail for the police. What, then, would he do, when he found the Mail already gone? He could only leave the station and take another train. He had not left the station by the barrier, and careful inquiry convinced Mr Peacock that it would have been extremely difficult for him to make his way out along the line unobserved, or hang about the railway premises till the following morning. An unfortunate suicide had taken place only the previous week, which had made the railwaymen particularly observant of stray passengers who might attempt to wander on to the permanent way; and, in addition, there happened to be two gangs of platelayers working with

flares at points strategically placed for observation. So that Peacock, while not altogether dismissing this part of the investigation, turned it over as routine work to his subordinates, and bent his mind to consider a second main possibility that had already occurred to him before he had been led away by speculations on the Irish Mail.

This was, that Simon Grant had never left the express at all, but had gone straight through to Euston. London has great advantages as a hiding-place—and what better thing could Grant have done, when his first scheme failed him, than return to the express and continue his journey? His watch would have warned him before he reached Rugby, that the Mail had probably left, a hasty enquiry and a quick dash to the booking-office, and he would be ready to continue his journey.

The only drawback was that when the Chief Inspector questioned the officials in the booking-office he was met by the positive statement that no ticket of any kind had been issued that night later than 10.15. Nor yet had any passenger arrived at Euston minus a ticket. And the possibility of an accomplice on the platform had now to be dismissed, since the original plan of escape had not involved an accomplice, and it was not reasonable to suppose that one had been provided beforehand for such an emergency.

But, argued the Chief Inspector, the emergency might have been foreseen and a ticket purchased in advance. And if so, it was going to be extremely difficult to prove, since the number of tickets issued would correspond with the number of passengers. He set in train, however, an exhaustive investigation into the question of the tickets issued in London, Birmingham, Coventry and Rugby during the few weeks previous to the disappearance, thinking that he might easily light upon a return half which had come to hand very much subsequent to the date of issue, and that this might suggest a line of inquiry. In addition, he sent out a broadcast appeal, and this is where his line of inquiry impinged upon the orbit of Mr. Montague Egg.

“To the Chief Commissioner of Police—DEAR SIR,”

‘wrote Mr. Egg in his neat commercial hand, “understanding as per the daily Press and the B B C that you desire to receive communications from all persons travelling by the 9.5 p.m. Birmingham-London express on the 4th ult., I beg to inform you that I travelled by same (3rd class) from Coventry to Euston on the date mentioned and that I am entirely at your disposal for all enquiries. Being attached to the firm of Plummet & Rose, wine and spirit merchants, Piccadilly, as travelling

representative, my permanent address will not find me at present, but I beg to enclose list of hotels where I shall be staying in the immediate future and remain, dear sir, yours faithfully "

In consequence of this letter, Mr Egg was one evening mysteriously called out of the commercial room at the Cat and Fiddle in Oldham to speak with a Mr Peacock.

"Pleased, I'm sure," said Mr Egg, prepared for anything from a colossal order for wine and spirits to a forgotten acquaintance with a bad-luck story "Monty-on-the-spot, that's me What can I do for you, sir?"

Chief Inspector Peacock appeared to want every conceivable detail of information about Mr Egg, his affairs and, in particular, his late journey to town Monty disposed capably of the preliminaries and mentioned that he had arrived at the station with plenty of time to spare, and so had contrived to get a seat as soon as the train came in

"And I was glad I did," he added "I like to be comfortable, you know, and the train was rather crowded "

"I know it was crowded," said Mr Peacock, with a groan "And well I may, when I tell you that we have had to get in touch with every single person on that train, and interview as many of them as we could get hold of personally "

"Some job," said Mr Egg, with the respect of one expert interviewer to another "Do you mean you've got in touch with them all?"

"Every blessed one," said Mr Peacock, "including several officious nuisances who weren't there at all, but hoped for a spot of notoriety "

"Talking of spots," said Monty, "what will you take?"

Mr Peacock thanked him, and accepted a small whisky-and-soda "Can you remember at all what part of the train you were in?"

"Certainly," said Mr Egg promptly "Third-class smoker, middle of the coach, middle of the train Safest, you know, in case of accidents Corner seat, corridor side, facing engine Immediately opposite me, picture of York Minster, being visited by two ladies and a gentleman, in costumes of 1904 or thereabouts Noticed it particularly, because everything else about the train was up to date Thought it a pity "

"Hum," said Mr Peacock "Do you remember who else was in the compartment at Coventry?"

Monty screwed up his eyes as though to squeeze recollection out through his eyelids

"Next me, stout, red, bald man, very sleepy, in tweeds Been

having one or two He'd come from Birmingham Next him, lanky young chap with pimples and a very bad bowler Got in after me and tripped over my feet Looked like a clerk And a young sailor in the corner seat—there when I arrived Talked all the time to the fellow in the corner opposite, who looked like some sort of a parson—collar round the wrong way, clerical hat, walrus moustache, dark spectacles, puffy cheeks and a tell-me-my-good-man way of talking Next him—oh! yes, a fellow smoking a pipe of horrible scented sort of tobacco—might have been a small tradesman, but I didn't see much of him, because he was reading a paper most of the time Then there was a nice, inoffensive, gentlemanly old bird who needed a haircut He had a pince-nez—very crooked—and never took his eyes off a learned-looking book And opposite me there was a chap with a big brown beard in a yellow inverness cloak—foreign looking—with a big, soft felt hat He came from Birmingham, and so did the parson, but the other two on that side got in after I did ”

The Chief Inspector smiled as he turned over the pages of a formidable bunch of documents “You're an admirable witness, Mr Egg Your account tallies perfectly with those of your seven fellow-travellers, but it's the only one of the eight that's complete You are obviously observant ”

“My job,” said Monty complacently

“Of course You may be interested to know that the gentlemanly old bird with the long hair was Professor Amblefoot of London University, the great authority on the Higher Calculus, and that he described you as a fair-haired, well-mannered young man ”

“Much obliged to him, I'm sure,” said Mr Egg

“The foreigner is Dr Schleicher of Kew—resident there three years—the sailor and the parson we know all about—the drunk chap is O K too—we had his wife along, very voluble—the tradesman is a well-known Coventry resident, something to do with the Church Council of St Michael's, and the pimply lad is one of Messrs Morrison's clerks They're all square And they all went through to town, didn't they? Nobody left at Rugby?”

“Nobody,” said Mr Egg

“Pity,” said the Chief Inspector “The truth is, Mr Egg, that we can't hear of any person in the train who hasn't come forward and given an account of himself, and the number of people who have come forward precisely corresponds with the number of tickets collected at the barriers at Euston You didn't observe any person continually hanging about the corridor, I suppose?”

“Not permanently,” said Monty “That chap with the beard got up and prowled a bit from time to time, I remember—seemed restless I thought he perhaps didn't feel very well But he'd only be absent a few minutes at a time He seemed to be a nervous, un-

pleasant sort of chap—chewed his nails, you know, and muttered in German, but he——”

“Chewed his nails?”

“Yes Very unpleasant, I must say ‘Well-kept hands that please the sight seize the trade and hold it tight, but bitten nails and grubby claws well may give the buyer pause’ So the *Salesman’s Handbook* says”—and Monty smirked gently at his own finger-tips “This person’s hands were—definitely not gentlemanly Bitten to the quick”

“But that’s really extraordinary,” said Peacock “Dr Schleicher’s hands are particularly well kept I interviewed him myself yesterday Surely he can’t suddenly have abandoned the habit of nail-biting? People don’t—not like that And why should he? Was there anything else you noticed about the man opposite you?”

“I don’t think so Yes Stop a moment. He smoked cigars at a most extraordinary rate I remember his going out into the corridor with one smoked down to about an inch and coming back, five minutes afterwards, with a new one smoked half-way through Full-sized Coronas too—good ones, and I know quite a bit about cigars”

Peacock stared and then smote his hand lightly upon the table

“I’ve got it!” he said “I remember where I met a set of badly chewed-up nails lately By Jove! Yes, but how could he——”

Monty waited for enlightenment

“Simon Grant’s secretary He was supposed to be in town all that day and evening, having ‘flu—but how do I know that he was? But, even so, what good could he do by being in the train in disguise? And what could Dr. Schleicher have to do with it? It’s Simon Grant we want—and Schleicher isn’t Grant—at least”—the Chief Inspector paused and went on more dubiously—“I don’t see how he could be They know him well in the district, though he’s said to be away from home a good deal, and he’s got a wife——”

“Oh, has he?” said Mr. Egg, with a meaning emphasis

“A double life, you mean?” said the Chief Inspector

“And a double wife,” said Mr. Egg “You will pardon my asking a delicate question, but—er—are you certain you would spot a false beard at once, if you weren’t altogether expecting it?”

“In a good light, I probably should, but by the light of the doctor’s reading-lamp—— But what’s the game, Mr. Egg? If Schleicher is Grant, who was the man you saw in the train—the man with the bitten finger-nails? Grant doesn’t bite his nails, I know that—he’s rather particular about his appearance, so I’m told, though I’ve never met him myself”

"Well," said Mr Egg, "since you ask me, why shouldn't the other man in the train be all three of them?"

"All three of which?"

"Grant and Schleicher and the secretary"

"I don't quite get you"

"Well, I mean—supposing Grant is Schleicher, with a nice ready-made personality all handy for him to step into, built up, as you may say, over the last three years, with money salted away in the name of Schleicher—well, I mean, there he is, as you might say, waiting to slip over to the Continent as soon as the fuss has died down—complete with unofficial lady"

"But the secretary?"

"The secretary was the man in train, made up as Grant made up as Schleicher I mean, speaking as a fool, I thought he might be"

"But where was Schleicher—I mean, Grant?"

"He was the man in the train, too I mean, he may have been"

"Do you mean there were two of them?"

"Yes—at least, that's how I see it You're the best judge, and I shouldn't like to put myself forward But they'd be playing Box and Cox Secretary gets in at Birmingham as Schleicher Grant gets in at Coventry as Grant Between Coventry and Rugby Grant changes to Schleicher in a wash-place or somewhere, and hangs about the platform and corridor till the train starts with him in it He retires presently into a wash-place again At a prearranged moment, secretary gets up, walks along the corridor and retires elsewhere, while Grant comes out and takes his place Presently Grant walks down the corridor and secretary comes back to the compartment They're never both visible at the same time, except for the two or three minutes while Grant is re-entering the train at Rugby, while honest witnesses like me are ready to come forward and swear that Schleicher got in at Birmingham, sat tight in his seat at Coventry and Rugby, and went straight through to Euston—as he did I can't say I noticed any difference between the two Schleichers, except in the matter of the cigar But they were very hairy and muffled up"

The Chief Inspector turned this over in his mind

"Which of them was Schleicher when they got out at Euston?"

"Grant, surely The secretary would remove his disguise at the last moment and emerge as himself, taking the thousand-to-one chance of somebody recognising him"

Peacock swore softly "If that's what he did," he exclaimed, "we've got him on toast Wait a moment, though I *knew* there was a snag If that's what they did, there ought to have been an extra third-class ticket at Euston They can't both have travelled on one ticket"

"Why not?" said Mr Egg "I have often—at least, I don't exactly mean that, but I have from time to time laid a wager with an acquaintance that I would travel on his ticket, and got away with it"

"Perhaps," said Chief Inspector Peacock, "you would oblige me, sir, by outlining your method"

"Oh, certainly," said Mr Egg "'Speak the truth with cheerful case if you would both convince and please'—Monty's favourite motto If I had been Mr Grant's secretary, I'd have taken a return ticket from Birmingham to London, and when the outward half had been inspected for the last time at Rugby, I'd pretend to put it in my pocket But I wouldn't really I'd shove it down the edge of my seat and go for my stroll along the corridor Then, when Grant took my place—recognising the right seat by an attaché-case, or something of that sort left on it—he'd retrieve the ticket and retain it At the end of the journey, I'd slip off my beard and spectacles and so on, stuck them in my overcoat pocket and fold the conspicuous overcoat inside-out and carry it on my arm Then I'd wait to see Grant get out, and follow him up to the barrier, keeping a little way behind He'd go through, giving up his ticket, and I'd follow along with a bunch of other people, making a little bustle and confusion in the gateway The ticket-collector would stop me and say 'I haven't got your ticket, sir' I'd be indignant, and say 'Oh, yes, you have' He'd say 'I don't think so, sir' Then I'd protest, and he'd probably ask me to stand aside a minute while he dealt with the other passengers Then I'd say 'See here, my man, I'm quite sure I gave up my ticket Look! Here's the return half, number so-and-so Just look through your bunch and see if you haven't got the companion half' He looks and he finds it, and says 'I beg your pardon, sir, you're quite right Here it is' I say 'Don't mention it,' and go through And even if he suspects me, he can't prove anything, and the other fellow is well out of the way by that time"

"I see," said the Chief Inspector "How often did you say you had indulged in this little game?"

"Well, never twice at the same station It doesn't do to repeat one's effects too often"

"I think I'd better interview Schleicher and his secretary again," said Peacock pensively "And the ticket-collector I suppose we were meant to think that Grant had skipped to the Irish Mail I admit we should have thought so but for the accident that the Mail left before the London train came in However, it takes a clever criminal to beat our organisation By the way, Mr Egg, I hope you will not make a habit——"

"Talking of bad habits," said Monty happily, "what about another spot?"

Harley Quin

THE COMING OF MR. QUIN

By

AGATHA CHRISTIE

IT was New Year's Eve

The elder members of the house party at Royston were assembled in the big hall

Mr Satterthwaite was glad that the young people had gone to bed. He was not fond of young people in herds. He thought them uninteresting and crude. They lacked subtlety and as life went on he had become increasingly fond of subtleties.

Mr Satterthwaite was sixty-two—a little bent, dried-up man with a peering face oddly elflike, and an intense and inordinate interest in other people's lives. All his life, so to speak, he had sat in the front row of the stalls watching various dramas of human nature unfold before him. His rôle had always been that of the onlooker. Only now, with old age holding him in its clutch, he found himself increasingly critical of the drama submitted to him. He demanded now something a little out of the common.

There was no doubt that he had a flair for these things. He knew instinctively when the elements of drama were at hand. Like a war horse, he sniffed the scent. Since his arrival at Royston this afternoon, that strange inner sense of his had stirred and bid him be ready. Something interesting was happening or going to happen.

The house party was not a large one. There was Tom Evesham, their genial good-humoured host and his serious political wife who had been before her marriage Lady Laura Keene. There was Sir Richard Conway, soldier, traveller and sportsman, there were six or seven young people whose names Mr Satterthwaite had not grasped and there were the Portals.

It was the Portals who interested Mr Satterthwaite.

He had never met Alex Portal before, but he knew all about him. Had known his father and his grandfather. Alex Portal ran pretty true to type. He was a man of close on forty, fair haired, and blue eyed like all the Portals, fond of sport, good at games, devoid of imagination. Nothing unusual about Alex Portal. The usual good sound English stock.

But his wife was different. She was, Mr Satterthwaite knew,

"I'm sure I hope it *will* be a happy New Year," Lady Laura was saying "But the political situation seems to me to be fraught with grave uncertainty"

"I'm sure it is," said Mr Satterthwaite earnestly "I'm sure it is"

"I only hope," continued Lady Laura, without the least change of manner, "that it will be a dark man who first crosses the threshold You know that superstition, I suppose, Mr Satterthwaite? No? You surprise me To bring luck to the house it must be a dark man who first steps over the doorstep on New Year's Day Dear me, I hope I shan't find anything *very* unpleasant in my bed I never trust the children They have such very high spirits" Shaking her head in sad foreboding, Lady Laura moved majestically up the staircase

With the departure of the women, chairs were pulled in closer round the blazing logs on the big open hearth

"Say when," said Evesham, hospitably, as he held up the whisky decanter

When everybody had said when, the talk reverted to the subject which had been tabooed before

"You knew Derek Capel, didn't you, Satterthwaite?" asked Conway

"Slightly—yes"

"And you, Portal?"

"No, I never met him"

So fiercely and defensively did he say it, that Mr Satterthwaite looked up in surprise

"I always hate it when Laura brings up the subject," said Evesham slowly "After the tragedy, you know, this place was sold to a big manufacturer fellow He cleared out after a year—didn't suit him or something A lot of tommy rot was talked about the place being haunted of course, and it gave the house a bad name Then, when Laura got me to stand for West Kidleby, of course it meant living up in these parts, and it wasn't so easy to find a suitable house Royston was going cheap, and—well, in the end I bought it Ghosts are all tommy rot, but all the same one doesn't exactly care to be reminded that you're living in a house where one of your own friends shot himself Poor old Derek—we shall never know why he did it"

"He won't be the first or the last fellow who's shot himself without being able to give a reason," said Alex Portal heavily

He rose and poured himself out another drink, splashing the whisky in with a liberal hand

"There's something very wrong with him," said Mr Satterthwaite to himself "Very wrong indeed I wish I knew what it was all about"

"Gad!" said Conway "Listen to the wind It's a wild night"

"A good night for ghosts to walk," said Potral with a reckless laugh "All the devils in Hell are abroad to-night"

"According to Lady Laura, even the blackest of them would bring us luck," observed Conway, with a laugh "Hark to that!"

The wind rose in another terrific wail, and as it died away there came three loud knocks on the big nailed doorway

Every one started

"Who on earth can that be at this time of night?" cried Evesham They stared at each other

"I will open it," said Evesham "The servants have gone to bed"

He strode across to the door, fumbled a little over the heavy bars, and finally flung it open An icy blast of wind came sweeping into the hall

Framed in the doorway stood a man's figure, tall and slender To Mr Satterthwaite, watching, he appeared by some curious effect of the stained glass above the door, to be dressed in every colour of the rainbow Then, as he stepped forward, he showed himself to be a thin dark man dressed in motoring clothes

"I must really apologise for this intrusion," said the stranger, in a pleasant level voice "But my car broke down Nothing much, my chauffeur is putting it to rights, but it will take half a hour or so, and it is so confoundedly cold outside——"

He broke off, and Evesham took up the thread quickly

"I should think it was Come in and have a drink We can't give you any assistance about the car, can we?"

"No, thanks My man knows what to do By the way, my name is Quin—Harley Quin"

"Sit down, Mr Quin," said Evesham "Sir Richard Conway, Mr Satterthwaite My name is Evesham"

Mr Quin acknowledged the introductions, and dropped into the chair that Evesham had hospitably pulled forward As he sat, some effect of the firelight threw a bar of shadow across his face which gave almost the impression of a mask

Evesham threw a couple more logs on the fire "A drink?"

"Thanks"

Evesham brought it to him and asked as he did so—

"So you know this part of the world well, Mr Quin?"

"I passed through it some years ago"

"Really?"

"Yes—This house belonged then to a man called Capel"

"Ah, yes," said Evesham "Poor Derek Capel You knew him?"

"Yes, I knew him,"

Evesham's manner underwent a faint change, almost imper-

ceptible to one who had not studied the English character. Before, it had contained a subtle reserve, now this was laid aside. Mr. Quin had known Derek Capel. He was the friend of a friend, and as such, was vouched for and fully accredited.

"Astounding affair, that," he said confidentially. "We were just talking about it. I can tell you, it went against the grain, buying this place. If there had been anything else suitable, but there wasn't, you see. I was in the house the night he shot himself—so was Conway, and upon my word, I've always expected his ghost to walk."

"A very inexplicable business," said Mr. Quin, slowly and deliberately, and he paused with the air of an actor who has just spoken an important cue.

"You may well say inexplicable," burst in Conway. "The thing's a black mystery—always will be."

"I wonder," said Mr. Quin, non-committally. "Yes, Sir Richard, you were saying?"

"Astounding—that's what it was. Here's a man in the prime of life, gay, light-hearted, without a care in the world. Five or six old pals staying with him. Top of his spirits at dinner, full of plans for the future. And from the dinner table he goes straight upstairs to his room, takes a revolver from a drawer and shoots himself. Why? Nobody ever knew. Nobody ever will know."

"Isn't that rather a sweeping statement, Sir Richard?" asked Mr. Quin, smiling.

Conway stared at him.

"What d'you mean? I don't understand."

"A problem is not necessarily unsolvable because it has remained unsolved."

"Oh! Come, man, if nothing came out at the time, it's not likely to come out now—ten years afterwards?"

Mr. Quin shook his head gently.

"I disagree with you. The evidence of history is against you. The contemporary historian never writes such a true history as the historian of a later generation. It is a question of getting the true perspective, of seeing things in proportion. If you like to call it so, it is, like everything else, a question of relativity."

Alex Portal leant forward, his face twitching painfully.

"You are right, Mr. Quin," he cried, "you are right. Time does not dispose of a question—it only presents it anew in a different guise."

Evesham was smiling tolerantly.

"Then you mean to say, Mr. Quin, that if we were to hold, let us say, a Court of Inquiry to-night, into the circumstances of Derek Capel's death, we are as likely to arrive at the truth as we should have been at the time?"

"*More* likely, Mr Evesham The personal equation has largely dropped out, and you will remember facts as facts without seeking to put your own interpretation upon them"

Evesham frowned doubtfully

"One must have a starting point, of course," said Mr Quin in his quiet level voice "A starting point is usually a theory One of you must have a theory, I am sure How about you, Sir Richard?"

Conway frowned thoughtfully

"Well, of course," he said apologetically, "we thought—naturally we all thought—that there must be a woman in it somewhere It's usually either that or money, isn't it? And it certainly wasn't money No trouble of that description So—what else could it have been?"

Mr Satterthwaite started He had leant forward to contribute a small remark of his own and in the act of doing so, he had caught sight of a woman's figure crouched against the balustrade of the gallery above She was huddled down against it, invisible from everywhere but where he himself sat, and she was evidently listening with strained attention to what was going on below So immovable was she that he hardly believed the evidence of his own eyes But he recognised the pattern of the dress easily enough—an old world brocade It was Eleanor Portal

And suddenly all the events of the night seemed to fall into pattern—Mr Quin's arrival, no fortuitous chance, but the appearing of an actor when his cue was given There was a drama being played in the big hall at Royston to-night—a drama none the less real in that one of the actors was dead Oh! yes, Derek Capel had a part in the play Mr Satterthwaite was sure of that

And, again suddenly, a new illumination came to him This was Mr Quin's doing It was he who was staging the play—was giving the actors their cues He was at the heart of the mystery pulling the strings, making the puppets work He knew everything, even to the presence of the woman crouched against the woodwork upstairs Yes, he knew

Sitting well back in his chair, secure in his rôle of audience, Mr Satterthwaite watched the drama unfold before his eyes Quietly and naturally, Mr Quin was pulling the strings, setting his puppets in motion

"A woman—yes," he murmured thoughtfully "There was no mention of any woman at dinner?"

"Why, of course," cried Evesham "He announced his engagement That's just what made it seem so absolutely mad Very bucked about it he was Said it wasn't to be announced just yet—but gave us the hint that he was in the running for the Benedick stakes"

"Of course we all guessed who the lady was," said Conway "Marjorie Dilke Nice girl"

It seemed to be Mr Quin's turn to speak, but he did not do so, and something about his silence seemed oddly provocative It was as though he challenged the last statement It had the effect of putting Conway in a defensive position

"Who else could it have been? Eh, Evesham?"

"I don't know," said Tom Evesham slowly "What did he say exactly now? Something about being in the running for the Benedict stakes—that he couldn't tell us the lady's name till he had her permission—it wasn't to be announced yet He said, I remember, that he was a damned lucky fellow That he wanted his two old friends to know that by that time next year he'd be a happy married man Of course, we assumed it was Marjorie They were great friends, and he'd been about with her a lot"

"The only thing——" began Conway and stopped

"What were you going to say, Dick?"

"Well, I mean, it was odd in a way, if it were Marjorie, that the engagement shouldn't be announced at once I mean, why the secrecy Sounds more as though it were a married woman—you know some one whose husband had just died, or who was divorcing him"

"That's true," said Evesham "If that were the case, of course the engagement couldn't be announced at once And you know, thinking back about it, I don't believe he had been seeing much of Marjorie All that was the year before I remember thinking things seemed to have cooled off between them"

"Curious," said Mr Quin

"Yes—looked almost as though some one had come between them"

"Another woman," said Conway thoughtfully

"By Jove," said Evesham "You know, there was something almost indecently hilarious about old Derek that night He looked almost drunk with happiness And yet—I can't quite explain what I mean—but he looked oddly defiant too"

"Like a man defying Fate," said Alex Portal heavily

Was it of Derek Capel he was speaking—or was it of himself? Mr Satterthwaite, looking at him, inclined to the latter view Yes, that was what Alex Portal represented—a man defying Fate

His imagination, muddled by drink, responded suddenly to that note in the story which recalled his own secret preoccupation

Mr Satterthwaite looked up She was still there Watching, listening—still motionless, frozen—like a dead woman

"Perfectly true," said Conway "Capel *was* excited—curiously so. I'd describe him as a man who has staked heavily and won against well nigh overwhelming odds"

"Getting up courage, perhaps, for what he's made up his mind to do?" suggested Portal

And as though moved by an association of ideas, he got up and helped himself to another drink

"Not a bit of it," said Evesham sharply "I'd almost swear nothing of that kind was in his mind Conway's right A successful gambler who has brought off a long shot and can hardly believe in his own good fortune That was the attitude"

Conway gave a gesture of discouragement

"And yet," he said "Ten minutes later——"

They sat in silence Evesham brought his hand down with a bang on the table

"Something must have happened in that ten minutes," he cried "It must! But what? Let's go over it carefully We were all talking In the middle of it Capel got up suddenly and left the room——"

"Why?" said Mr Quinn

The interruption seemed to disconcert Evesham

"I beg your pardon?"

"I only said Why?" said Mr Quin

Evesham frowned in an effort of memory

"It didn't seem vital—at the time—— Oh! of course—the Post Don't you remember that jangling bell, and how excited we were We'd been snowed up for three days, remember Biggest snow-storm for years and years All the roads were impassable No newspapers, no letters Capel went out to see if something had come through at last, and got a great pile of things Newspapers and letters He opened the paper to see if there was any news, and then went upstairs with his letters Three minutes afterwards, we heard a shot Inexplicable—absolutely inexplicable"

"That's not inexplicable," said Portal "Of course the fellow got some unexpected news in a letter Obvious, I should have said"

"Oh! Don't think we missed anything so obvious as that It was one of the Coroner's first questions *But Capel never opened one of his letters* The whole pile lay unopened on his dressing-table"

Portal looked crestfallen

"You're sure he didn't open just one of them? He might have destroyed it after reading it?"

"No, I'm quite positive Of course, that would have been the natural solution No, every one of the letters was unopened Nothing burnt—nothing torn up—There was no fire in the room?"

Portal shook his head

"Extraordinary"

"It was a ghastly business altogether," said Evesham in a low

voice "Conway and I went up when we heard the shot, and found him— It gave me a shock, I can tell you "

"Nothing to be done but telephone for the police, I suppose?" said Mr Quin

"Royston wasn't on the telephone then I had it put in when I bought the place No, luckily enough, the local constable happened to be in the kitchen at the time One of the dogs—you remember poor old Rover, Conway?—had strayed the day before. A passing carter had found it half buried in a snowdrift and had taken it to the police station They recognised it as Capel's, and a dog he was particularly fond of, and the constable came up with it He'd just arrived a minute before the shot was fired It saved us some trouble "

"Gad, that was a snowstorm," said Conway reminiscently "About this time of year, wasn't it? Early January "

"February, I think Let me see, we went abroad soon afterwards "

"I'm pretty sure it was January My hunter Ned—you remember Ned?—lamed himself the end of January That was just after this business "

"It must have been quite the end of January then Funny how difficult it is to recall dates after a lapse of years "

"One of the most difficult things in the world," said Mr Quin, conversationally "Unless you can find a landmark in some big public event—an assassination of a crowned head, or a big murder trial "

"Why, of course," cried Conway, "it was just before the Appleton case "

"Just after, wasn't it?"

"No, no, don't you remember—Capel knew the Appletons—he'd stayed with the old man the previous Spring—just a week before he died He was talking of him one night—what an old curmudgeon he was, and how awful it must have been for a young and beautiful woman like Mrs Appleton to be tied to him There was no suspicion then that she had done away with him "

"By Jove, you're right I remember reading the paragraph in the paper saving an exhumation order had been granted It would have been that same day—I remember only seeing it with half my mind, you know, the other half wondering about poor old Derek lying dead upstairs "

"A common, but very curious phenomenon, that," observed Mr Quin "In moments of great stress, the mind focuses itself upon some quite unimportant matter which is remembered long afterwards with the utmost fidelity, driven in, as it were, by the mental stress of the moment It may be some quite irrelevant

detail, like the pattern of a wallpaper, but it will never be forgotten."

"Rather extraordinary, your saying that, Mr Quin," said Conway. "Just as you were speaking, I suddenly felt myself back in Derek Capel's room—with Derek lying dead on the floor—I saw as plainly as possible the big tree outside the window, and the shadow it threw upon the snow outside. Yes, the moonlight, the snow, and the shadow of the tree—I can see them again this minute. By Gad, I believe I could draw them, and yet I never realised I was looking at them at the time."

"His room was the big one over the porch, was it not?" asked Mr Quin.

"Yes, and the tree was the big beech, just at the angle of the drive."

Mr Quin nodded, as though satisfied. Mr Satterthwaite was curiously thrilled. He was convinced that every word, every inflection of Mr Quin's voice was pregnant with purpose. He was driving at something—exactly what Mr Satterthwaite did not know, but he was quite convinced as to whose was the master hand.

There was a momentary pause, and then Evesham reverted to the preceding topic.

"That Appleton case, I remember it very well now. What a sensation it made. She got off, didn't she? Pretty woman, very fair—remarkably fair."

Almost against his will, Mr Satterthwaite's eyes sought the kneeling figure up above. Was it his fancy, or did he see it shrink a little as though at a blow. Did he see a hand slide upwards to the table cloth—and then pause.

There was a crash of falling glass. Alex Portal, helping himself to whisky, had let the decanter slip.

"I say—sir, damn sorry. Can't think what came over me."

Evesham cut short his apologies.

"Quite all right. Quite all right, my dear fellow. Curious—That smash reminded me. That's what she did, didn't she? Mrs Appleton? Smashed the port decanter?"

"Yes. Old Appleton had his glass of port—only one—each night. The day after his death, one of the servants saw her take the decanter out and smash it deliberately. That set them talking, of course. They all knew she had been perfectly wretched with him. Rumour grew and grew, and in the end, months later, some of his relatives applied for an exhumation order. And sure enough, the old fellow had been poisoned. Arsenic, wasn't it?"

"No—strychnine, I think. It doesn't much matter. Well, of course, there it was. Only one person was likely to have done it. Mrs Appleton stood her trial. She was acquitted more through

the lack of evidence against her, than from any overwhelming proof of innocence. In other words, she was lucky. Yes, I don't suppose there's much doubt she did it right enough. What happened to her afterwards?"

"Went out to Canada, I believe. Or was it Australia. She had an uncle or something of the sort out there who offered her a home. Best thing she could do under the circumstances."

Mr Satterthwaite was fascinated by Alex Portal's right hand as it clasped his glass. How tightly he was gripping it.

"You'll smash that in a minute or two, if you're not careful," thought Mr Satterthwaite. "Dear me, how interesting all this is."

Evesham rose and helped himself to a drink.

"Well, we're not much nearer to knowing why poor Derek Capel shot himself," he remarked. "The Court of Inquiry hasn't been a great success, has it, Mr Quin?"

Mr Quin laughed.

It was a strange laugh, mocking—yet sad. It made every one jump.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You are still living in the past, Mr Evesham. You are still hampered by your preconceived notion. But I—the man from outside, the stranger passing by, see only—facts!"

"Facts?"

"Yes—facts."

"What do you mean?" said Evesham.

"I see a clear sequence of facts, outlined by yourselves, but of which you have not seen the significance. Let us go back ten years and look at what we see—untrammelled by ideas or sentiment."

Mr Quin had risen. He looked very tall. The fire leaped fitfully behind him. He spoke in a low compelling voice.

"You are at dinner. Derek Capel announces his engagement. You think then it was to Marjorie Dilke. You are not so sure now. He has the restlessly excited manner of a man who has successfully defied Fate—who, in your own words, has pulled off a big coup against overwhelming odds. Then comes the clanging of the bell. He goes out to get the long overdue mail. He doesn't open his letters, but you mention yourselves that *he opened the paper to glance at the news*. It is ten years ago—so we cannot know what the news was that day—a far off earthquake, a near at hand political crisis? The only thing we do know about the contents of that paper is that it contained one small paragraph—a paragraph stating that the Home Office had given permission to exhumate the body of Mr Appleton three days ago."

"What?"

Mr Quin went on

"Derek Capel goes up to his room, and there he sees something out of the window Sir Richard Conway has told us that the curtain was not drawn across it and further that it gave on to the drive What did he see? What could he have seen that forced him to take his life?"

"What do you mean? What did he see?"

"I think," said Mr Quin, "that he saw a policeman A policeman who had come about a dog— But Derek Capel didn't know that—he just saw—a policeman"

There was a long silence—as though it took some time to drive the inference home

"My God!" whispered Evesham at last "You can't mean that? Appleton? But he wasn't there at the time Appleton died The old man was alone with his wife——"

But he may have been there a week earlier Strychnine is not very soluble unless it is in the form of hydrochloride The greater part of it, put into the port, would be taken in the last glass, perhaps a week after he left"

Portal sprung forward His voice was hoarse and his eyes bloodshot

"Why did she break the decanter?" he cried "Why did she break the decanter? Tell me that?"

For the first time that evening, Mr Quin addressed himself to Mr Satterthwaite

"You have a wide experience of life, Mr Satterthwaite Perhaps you can tell us that"

Mr Satterthwaite's voice trembled a little His cue had come at last He was to speak some of the most important lines in the play He was an actor now—not a looker on

"As I see it," he murmured modestly "She—cared for Derek Capel She was, I think, a good woman—and she had sent him away When her husband—died, she suspected the truth And so, to save the man she loved, she tried to destroy the evidence against him Later, I think, he persuaded her that her suspicions were unfounded, and she consented to marry him But even then, she hung back—women, I fancy, have a lot of instinct"

Mr Satterthwaite had spoken his part

Suddenly a long trembling sigh filled the air

"My God!" cried Evesham, starting, "what was that?"

Mr Satterthwaite could have told him that it was Eleanor Portal in the gallery above, but he was too artistic to spoil a good effect

Mr Quin was smiling

"My car will be ready by now Thank you for your hospitality, Mr Evesham I have, I hope, done something for my friend"

They stared at him in blank amazement

"That aspect of the matter has not struck you? He loved this woman, you know. Loved her enough to commit murder for her sake. When retribution overtook him, as he mistakenly thought, he took his own life. But unwittingly, he left her to face the music."

"She was acquitted," muttered Evesham

"Because the case against her could not be proved. I fancy—it may be only a fancy—that she is still—facing the music."

Portal had sunk into a chair, his face buried in his hands

Quin turned to Satterthwaite

"Good-bye, Mr Satterthwaite. You are interested in the drama, are you not?"

Mr Satterthwaite nodded—surprised

"I must recommend the Harlequinade to your attention. It is dying out nowadays—but it repays attention, I assure you. It's symbolism is a little difficult to follow—but the immortals are always immortal, you know. I wish you all good-night."

They saw him stride out into the dark. As before the coloured glass gave the effect of motley.

Mr Satterthwaite went upstairs. He went to draw down his window, for the air was cold. The figure of Mr Quin moved down the drive, and from a side door came a woman's figure, running. For a moment they spoke together, then she retraced her steps to the house. She passed just below the window, and Mr Satterthwaite was struck anew by the vitality of her face. She moved now like a woman in a happy dream.

"Eleanor!"

Alex Portal had joined her.

"Eleanor, forgive me—forgive me—You told me the truth, but God forgive me—I did not quite believe."

Mr Satterthwaite was intensely interested in other people's affairs, but he was also a gentleman. It was borne in upon him that he must shut the window. He did so.

But he shut it very slowly.

He heard her voice, exquisite and indescribable.

"I know—I know. You have been in hell. So was I once. Loving—yet alternately believing and suspecting—thrusting aside one's doubts and having them spring up again with leering faces. I know, Alex, I know. But there is a worse hell than that, the hell I have lived in with you. I have seen your doubt—your fear of me. poisoning all our love. That man—that chance passer-by, saved me. I could bear it no longer, you understand. To-night—to-night I was going to kill myself."

Alex Alex

Mr. Pepper

I MEET MR. PEPPER

By

SIR BASIL THOMSON

I HAD always been brought up to believe that all truly great men are modest, and when my friend Archer gave me the address of Mr Pepper, I was prepared to find a man who would wave his world reputation aside with a deprecating smile, as all really great men do. Archer has a positive genius for discovering the unrecognised Great—it was he who discovered Barker, “the greatest poet of the twentieth century,” who was languishing in a Bloomsbury boarding-house and reciting his masterpieces to the ladies after high tea because he was too sensitive to publish them. I have always understood that Archer had something to do with the Cubists and Hezekiah Jones, the Welsh composer, who writes his music without keys, bars or beats (I hope that these are the correct musical terms), at any rate, without any of the trammels that fettered better known but less gifted composers in the past. Archer knew, of course, that I am not clever, he knew, also, that I was interested in the science of detection and read all the detective literature that is humanly possible for one man with intervals for sleep and meals, and he whispered to me as he passed me in the library, “You ought to know Pepper.”

“Who is Pepper?”

“What? You haven’t heard of Pepper? He’s the world’s greatest detective, just come over from America—or, at least, they say from America—to bring a fresh eye to bear on our crime mysteries. You know, between ourselves, he has a very poor opinion of Scotland Yard.”

So, of course, have I. I had not read the adventures of Sherlock Holmes for nothing.

“Is he anything like Sherlock Holmes?” I asked.

“Not a bit, in fact, you wouldn’t take him for a detective at all. Though, naturally, he does not like it referred to, he is the son of a German baron, or a nobleman of some kind. Before the war his father is said to have emigrated to America, and was known as Von Pfeffer, but that, of course, was changed to Pepper, and I don’t think that the son has ever called himself anything else. The story goes that he began his career as a reporter on one of the Middle West papers, and, naturally, he specialised in crime. They say that there is no crime mystery that he has not solved.”

"He must be a remarkable man I should like to meet him very much"

"Then we'll arrange it I'll try to get him to lunch at Jules' on Tuesday He's a difficult man to catch, and he wouldn't care to be seen at a Club I'll get a private room If you don't hear to the contrary, one o'clock on Tuesday"

That luncheon party was one of the most interesting in my life Mr Pepper was, as Archer had said, not in the least like a detective, and that made him all the more interesting as a psychological study He was a man of medium height, with fair hair, growing a little thin on the temples, a rather florid complexion, and a bristling blond moustache His shoulders were broad and his hands where what I should call "useful," rather than ornamental, they were fat hands, and the fingers were rather short and thick But it was his face that riveted the attention In a crowd one might not have noticed him, except that the back of his head was unusually flat, but when one looked into the penetrating light blue eyes one saw at once that this was no ordinary man—that a brain was hard at work behind the mask

He spoke very little at the luncheon Like all men who work with their brains, he did not make the mistake of starving it, for I noticed that he ate and drank not at all sparingly When the waiter had withdrawn, and Archer had poured out for us some really excellent port, he became more communicative I began to learn something of the secret of his extraordinary success Let me attempt to set down some of the aphorisms which Archer succeeded in drawing from him by allusions to his most famous cases "If there is an obvious clue to a mystery do not attempt to follow it it will lead you wrong." "If one person only had a motive for the crime you may feel certain that he is innocent" "Look for the unlikely, and, preferably, the sensational explanation, and in nine cases out of ten you will be right" "Make a practice of being interviewed by reporters From time to time you will find them useful in publishing theories which prove later to be unfounded these, of course, you have given them in order to lull the real culprit into security" All these rather startling aphorisms were dropped quite casually and with becoming modesty

"I am afraid, Mr Pepper," I said, "that Scotland Yard works upon exactly opposite methods They seem always to go for the motive and the clue, and they pride themselves on the number of convictions they obtain"

"Convictions!" he exclaimed pityingly "What are convictions? A mere waste of time They've no publicity value What is wanted is not to convince a jury of twelve stupid men, but to appeal to that vast silent jury of public opinion—the enormous public that reads newspapers *That* is worth a detective's while You must form

a theory, build up your theory from the facts, and then face the world with it "

"Then you think," said Archer, "that most men who are condemned by the courts are wrongfully convicted? I have always suspected that "

"What else can you expect? It is my business to show that they are "

When the party broke up I asked him on what case he was now working. He would not tell me. All he said was, "Come and see," and he gave me his card. When he had taken his leave, Archer said, "You have made an impression. I never knew him say that to any one else. And would you believe it," he added indignantly, "I happen to know one of the Inspectors from Scotland Yard—Inspector Peahen—and when I asked him whether he knew Pepper, and what he thought of him, he said, 'Oh, yes! We call him the Brass Band Detective.' Jealousy, I suppose "

I found Mr Pepper in a lodging as modest as his demeanour. It was a furnished bedroom and sitting-room over an Italian restaurant in Charlotte Street, Soho, which, he said, he found convenient for his meals.

"I chose this neighbourhood," he said, "because I am here to study the people, and there are more criminals in proportion to the population in these streets than in any other part of your City." He had put on an old tweed working-jacket and had an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

He put me into the only arm-chair and said, "I want you to feel quite at home here. Drop in every day if you like, and I'll tell you what I am working on. It is very often helpful even to the expert to see how his ideas strike the amateur." (He pronounced the word "amature.") And then a quick suspicion seemed to cross his mind. "You are not thinking of entering the profession yourself, Mr Meddlestone-Jones?"

I reassured him on that point, and explained that I was one of those unhappy persons cursed with an inherited competence which made it unnecessary for me to enter a profession while I was still young enough.

"Ah! The interested amateur. I could not have anything better." His pale blue eyes seemed to search my soul. "Have you formed any opinion on the Margesson case?"

All that I knew about this "case" was the information given in all the London evening papers under the headings of "Sudden death of a Titled Official", "Tragic End of a Great Career", "Sudden Death in Hyde Park." It had not interested me greatly because Sir Henry had reached the ripe age of seventy-five, and, after all, a man of that age has to die somewhere for the purpose of dying, Hyde Park seemed to me to be as useful as a bed. But

of course, I did not know all the extraordinary details that I was to hear from Pepper

"I suppose that you read the account of the inquest," he began "Sir Henry Margesson had dined early at the Oriental Club, it was a perfect evening with still an hour of daylight He walked with a friend who had served with him in India through Upper Brook Street to Park Lane, the friend saw him safe across the roadway and they parted at Hyde Park Corner, the friend to take a 'bus to South Kensington where he lived, Sir Henry to walk through the Park to Cumberland Gate From that moment until a young man named John People, a curious name you will admit—until this man People noticed an old gentleman in front of him stumble and fall a little north of the Achilles Statue, nothing is known A crowd is round him in a moment The man who collects the money for the chairs summons the police; an ambulance is sent for, the body is taken to the mortuary, the identity is established from a visiting card in the dead man's pocket, the relatives, a son and a daughter, are sent for, they do their best to prevent an inquest from being held, and then a coroner's jury finds a verdict of "*Death from natural causes*" Think of it! This foul murder a death from natural causes"

"Murder?"

"Certainly Why not?"

"But surely there was medical evidence?"

"There always is, and it is always safe to ignore it The police surgeon examines the body and goes for 'heart failure'—the one refuge for all incompetents The daughter says that her father suffered from his heart, the dead man's own physician says the same with some additional details There was only one point in the evidence of that doctor that is worth noting he said that Sir Henry was a 'bad patient,' and would never listen to his warnings Now I am going to make a suggestion to you Why not work on this case with me? If you will I'll take you to my office immediately after lunch"

His offer, accompanied as it was by some flattering observation or what he called my "intelligence," was quite overwhelming It was more than I had ever dared to hope for It was the first hint I had had that he had an office I imagined it an exquisitely-arranged laboratory equipped with all that modern detective science requires We walked to it from Soho It consisted of two fairly large rooms on the first floor of a very old house in the Adelphi On a doorplate I noticed the words, "Mr Pepper Investigator," and on a card suspended underneath it, "Walk right in," words that indicated the country to which Mr Pepper owed his education The outer office was impressively furnished with a Turkey carpet and leather arm-chairs for the clients, so placed that they were in

the full light while Mr Pepper sat at his table in the shadow. Behind him were rows upon rows of bottles all neatly labelled and against the other walls were the drawers of a card index and some book-shelves.

"Do tell me before I sit down, what is in those bottles," I said.

"Oh," said he carelessly, "only samples of dust. No modern investigator could work without those." I looked at the labels. "Dust, carpenter's pockets," "Dust, Sevenoaks," "Dust, Bodmin," and so on. He must have collected dust from every road in England, France and Belgium.

"Perhaps you would like to see my workshop," he said, leading me into the inner room. Under the window was a large microscope. Here again, there were rows of bottles, and the ordinary apparatus of a chemical laboratory. "Most of my visitors ask to be taken in here," he added.

"What are those?" I asked, pointing to some bottles with red labels.

"Poisons. I am trying some experiments. Those with black labels are snake poisons, and the rare and little known Curare, which is used in South America for poisoning spears and arrows. And that brings us back to Sir Henry. Come into the other room, and we will discuss the case."

When we were installed he offered me a cigar. I declined, but he chose one for himself, and chewed the end without lighting it. I offered him a match.

"Thank you, not yet. An unlighted cigar is a great aid to reflection. You see, of course, now, that Sir Henry Margesson was murdered?"

"I confess——" I began, but he interrupted me.

"Of course it was a murder. He had served for years in India, and as a Deputy Commissioner, or whatever he was, no doubt he was instrumental in putting down the Thugs."

"He took his pension twenty-five years ago."

"Those people have long memories. I hope to show you not only that it was a murder, but also that the poison used was snake poison, extracted from the poison fangs of the Hamadryad. You look astonished, but let me take you over the known facts. Sir Henry dined at the Oriental Club. Now at that Club there will be found an Indian cook who makes curries as curries should be made. Sir Henry has been watched for years by one of those relentless and secret gangs that are the curse of Oriental countries. Why did they not attack him before, you will ask me. Because they never had just such an opportunity as they had on that fatal Tuesday evening, Sir Henry dining at the club, mentioning in the hearing of a waiter, that he would stroll home through Hyde Park. They follow him to Hyde Park Corner, where he parted from his friend

you know how crowded that pavement is where the buses stop A man jostles him, Sir Henry feels the slightest prick in the arm, a prick so slight that he is scarcely conscious of it, he begins his walk northward, feels giddy, falls The evidence of the man who collects money for the chairs was that the murdered man had a peaceful expression on his face as if he was asleep A guinea-pig on which I experimented with the same poison only yesterday, died with just such an expression If it had been curare it would have been a different thing "

The man's pale blue eyes were blazing with enthusiasm I suppose that all geniuses are enthusiastic

"The doctor spoke of heart disease," I modestly ventured

"Exactly That goes to prove my point. Hamadryad poison acts directly on the heart It practically stops it dead Oh, Mr Meddlestone-Jones, don't neglect such a chance as this. Think of what it means! The breaking up of the most subtle and dangerous gang in Europe "

"I'll do anything you like," I said The man was throbbing with excitement

"You will? Then we'll work the case together You shall do the outdoor investigation I the arrangement of your material " To sit at the feet of such a teacher exceeded my wildest dreams I thanked him very warmly.

"You have many points to work upon Begin with the Indian cook "

I happened to know a member of the Oriental Club fairly intimately The entire club became the guests of my club every August while they were turned out for cleaning I approached him cautiously by asking him what became of the club servants when the club was closed He said that he was not on the Committee and didn't know He supposed that they went on board wages I became bolder You must miss your Indian cook very much when you come to us—for curries, I mean "

He looked surprised "We haven't got an Indian cook, and I hate curries—eaten too many of 'em "

This was a facer at the outset, but when I reported this to Mr Pepper he seemed to be delighted "It is worse than I thought," he said "the gang has tampered with the English Club servants probably there are Europeans in the gang itself very likely that man, People, who gave evidence at the inquest I want you now to study Sir Henry's career in India, with particular reference to his efforts to suppress the Thugs "

With the help of books of reference and of friends who had served in India, I studied Sir Henry's past, which seemed to have been extraordinarily uneventful Evidently he had done his best to make his biography in *Who's Who* an impressive document, but

he had failed because he had never done anything in particular except obey orders. He had passed into the Indian Civil rather low down on the list and had performed routine duties throughout his service. He had never had to put down anything, not even a famine. "Born, married, died," would have been a quite adequate biography. His superiors must have appreciated his docility since they gave him a K C I E, but no one seemed to have minded when he retired and left a vacancy for an abler man. After his retirement he lived on his pension and his wife's money, he had not even joined the board of any public company. It appeared that he did not drink or smoke, and he played a very poor hand at bridge, indeed, there was usually a muttered exclamation on the part of the member who cut him for partner, but this was quite safe because Sir Henry was growing a little deaf. When he played the wrong card he explained that his eyesight was failing and he did not see the cards very well. As far as I was able to learn, he had never had an enemy. No one had an interest in his death as he had nothing to leave and his pension died with him.

I was mistaken in thinking that all this negative information would daunt my Chief, if I may be permitted so to call him. He bit his unlighted cigar very hard and said, "That man died from hamadryad poison, and we have got to find out who administered it."

"Could some one have been experimenting with the stuff—I mean a total stranger?" I realised how fatuous the suggestion was as soon as I said the words. Fortunately, my Chief was deep in thought and was not listening.

"There is nothing else for it," he said at last, "you must have a talk with his medical man." He gave me a very interesting disquisition upon hamadryad poison and its effects, in order that I might display some knowledge of the subject. The interview cost me three guineas, because I had to visit the doctor's consulting room as an ordinary patient. I found him courtesy itself.

Dr Hammond had a consulting practice in Harley Street. His waiting-room was crowded with people who sat glaring at each other under the cover of periodicals some weeks old. I had to wait for half an hour. He received me with great cordiality. "Now, what's the trouble?" he said. "If you will allow me to say so you look as sound as a bell."

"Worry and sleeplessness," I said. I should explain that in a difficult case such as this the approach has to be made by rather devious paths. He felt my pulse, looked at my tongue and shook his head.

"You smoke too many cigarettes. Cut them down." (This to me who rarely smoke more than thirty a day!) "What are you worrying about?"

I told him that it was about the death of Sir Henry Margesson, that I could not get out of my mind that there had been foul play. He seemed to be genuinely astonished.

"I attended him and I gave evidence at the inquest. It was a case of old age, a copious meal and a weak heart—the most natural and painless death in the world."

I felt that I had to startle him.

"But if a man ran at him and pricked him with a needle tipped with hamadryad poison——"

He looked very hard into my eyes, picked up my card and laid it down again. His next question was quite irrelevant.

"Has any doctor been attending you, Mr Meddlestone-Jones? I mean have your friends called in any one?" I could not imagine what he meant.

"That is scarcely an answer to my question. You must know the effects of hamadryad poison."

"I do," he said. "And the grass round the Achilles statue is well known to be infested with snakes, particularly in the evening. But, seriously, it is extraordinary that you should have said that. The old gentleman himself was interested in snake poisons in an amateurish sort of way. The number of deaths from snake bite was an obsession with him and I remember that he showed me a number of bottles containing what he said was snake poison which he administered to guinea-pigs in his back-yard. I found it difficult sometimes to get away from him."

I nearly leapt out of my chair. "What was his object?" I asked.

"Oh! He thought he was going to make Venin—a culture to cure snake-bite. It was quite useless to tell him that it was discovered long ago and has been in use for years."

"Could he have pricked himself by accident—always supposing that his symptoms were consistent with snake poison?"

"He was the sort of old gentleman who might have done anything. He was in such a state of health that anything—even a light blow with a hammer on his thumb—would have been sufficient to cause death."

The doctor continued to eye me whimsically as if he found me a more interesting case than Sir Henry Margesson. "A heavy meal, a little physical exercise, and—the end," he added finally.

I was bursting with the news when I returned to the office. My Chief listened rather abstractedly as if he had lost interest in the case. "I still incline to the belief that it was murder," he said. "But I have had a far more interesting case put into my hands to-day—the burglary in Middlesex Street. We must get to work at once."

It was this power of "switching off," so to speak, from one case to another, which showed the real genius of the man.

Mr J. G. Reeder

THE POETICAL POLICEMAN

By

EDGAR WALLACE

THE day Mr Reeder arrived at the Public Prosecutor's office was indeed a day of fate for Mr Lambton Green, Branch Manager of the London Scottish and Midland Bank

That branch of the bank which Mr Green controlled was situate at the corner of Pell Street and Firling Avenue on the "country side" of Ealing. It is a fairly large building and, unlike most suburban branch offices, the whole of the premises were devoted to banking business, for the bank carried very heavy deposits, the Lunar Traction Company, with three thousand people on its pay-roll, the Associated Novelties Corporation, with its enormous turnover, and the Laraphone Company being only three of the L S M's customers

On Wednesday afternoons, in preparation for the pay days of these corporations, large sums in currency were brought from the head office and deposited in the steel and concrete strong-room, which was immediately beneath Mr Green's private office, but admission to which was gained through a steel door in the general office. This door was observable from the street, and to assist observation there was a shaded lamp fixed to the wall immediately above, which threw a powerful beam of light upon the door. Further security was ensured by the employment of a night watchman, Arthur Malling, an army pensioner.

The bank lay on a restricted police beat which had been so arranged that the constable on patrol passed the bank every forty minutes. It was his practice to look through the window and exchange signals with the night watchman, his orders being to wait until Malling appeared.

On the night of October 17th Police-Constable Burnett stopped as usual before the wide peep-hole and glanced into the bank. The first thing he noticed was that the lamp above the strong-room door had been extinguished. The night watchman was not visible, and, his suspicions aroused, the officer did not wait for the man to put in an appearance as he would ordinarily have done, but passed the window to the door, which, to his alarm, he found ajar. Pushing it open, he entered the bank, calling Malling by name. There was no answer.

Permeating the air was a faint, sweet scent which he could not locate. The general offices were empty and, entering the manager's room in which a light burnt, he saw a figure stretched upon the ground. It was the night watchman. His wrists were handcuffed, two straps had been tightly buckled about his knees and ankles.

The explanation for the strange and sickly aroma was now clear. Above the head of the prostrate man was suspended, by a wire hooked to the picture-rail, an old tin can, the bottom of which was perforated so that there fell an incessant trickle of some volatile liquid upon the thick cotton pad which covered Mallings's face.

Burnett, who had been wounded in the war, had instantly recognised the smell of chloroform and, dragging the unconscious man into the outer office, snatched the pad from his face and, leaving him only long enough to telephone to the police station, sought vainly to bring him to consciousness.

The police reserves arrived within a few minutes, and with them the divisional surgeon who, fortunately, had been at the station when the alarm came through. Every effort to restore the unfortunate man to life proved unavailing.

"He was probably dead when he was found," was the police doctor's verdict. "What those scratches are on his right palm is a mystery."

He pulled open the clenched fist and showed half a dozen little scratches. They were recent, for there was a smear of blood on the palm.

Burnett was sent at once to arouse Mr Green, the manager, who lived in Firling Avenue, at the corner of which the bank stood, a street of semi-detached villas of a pattern familiar enough to the Londoner. As the officer walked through the little front garden to the door he saw a light through the panels, and he had hardly knocked before the door was opened and Mr Lambton Green appeared, fully dressed and, to the officer's discerning eye, in a state of considerable agitation. Constable Burnett saw on a hall chair a big bag, a travelling rug and an umbrella.

The little manager listened, pale as death, whilst Burnett told him of his discovery.

"The bank robbed? Impossible!" he almost shrieked. "My God! this is awful!"

He was so near the point of collapse that Burnett had to assist him into the street.

"I—I was going away on a holiday," he said incoherently, as he walked up the dark thoroughfare towards the bank premises. "The fact is—I was leaving the bank. I left a note—explaining to the directors."

Into a circle of suspicious men the manager tottered. He unlocked the drawer of his desk, looked and crumbled up

"They're not here!" he said wildly "I left them here—my keys—with the note!"

And then he swooned. When the dazed man recovered he found himself in a police cell and, later in the day, he drooped before a police magistrate, supported by two constables and listened, like a man in a dream, to a charge of causing the death of Arthur Mallings, and further, of converting to his own use the sum of £100,000.

It was on the morning of the first remand that Mr John G Reeder, with some reluctance for he was suspicious of all Government departments, transferred himself from his own office on Lower Regent Street to a somewhat gloomy bureau on the top floor of the building which housed the Public Prosecutor. In making this change he advanced only one stipulation that he should be connected by private telephone wire with his old bureau.

He did not demand this—he never demanded anything. He asked, nervously and apologetically. There was a certain wistful helplessness about John G Reeder that made people feel sorry for him, that caused even the Public Prosecutor a few uneasy moments of doubt as to whether he had been quite wise in substituting this weak-appearing man of middle age for Inspector Holford—bluff, capable and heavily mysterious.

Mr Reeder was something over fifty, a long-faced gentleman with sandy-grey hair and a slither of side whiskers that mercifully distracted attention from his large outstanding ears. He wore half-way down his nose a pair of steel-rimmed pince-nez, through which nobody had ever seen him look—they were invariably removed when he was reading. A high and flat-crowned bowler hat matched and yet did not match a frock-coat tightly buttoned across his sparse chest. His boots were square-toed, his cravat—of the broad, chest-protector pattern—was ready-made and buckled into place behind a Gladstonian collar. The neatest appendage to Mr Reeder was an umbrella rolled so tightly that it might be mistaken for a frivolous walking cane. Rain or shine, he carried this article hooked to his arm, and within living memory it had never been unfurled.

Inspector Holford (promoted now to the responsibilities of Superintendent) met him in the office to hand over his duties, and a more tangible quantity in the shape of old furniture and fixings.

"Glad to know you, Mr Reeder. I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you before, but I've heard a lot about you. You've been doing Bank of England work, haven't you?"

Mr Reeder whispered that he had had that honour, and sighed as though he regretted the drastic sweep of fate that had torn him from the obscurity of his labours. Mr Holford's scrutiny was full of misgivings.

"Well," he said awkwardly, "this job is different, though I'm told that you are one of the best informed men in London, and if that is the case this will be easy work. Still, we've never had an outsider—I mean, so to speak, a private detective—in this office before, and naturally the Yard is a bit——"

"I quite understand," murmured Mr Reeder, hanging up his immaculate umbrella. "It is very natural. Mr Boland expected the appointment. His wife is annoyed—very properly. But she has no reason to be. She is an ambitious woman. She has a third interest in a West End dancing club that might be raided one of these days."

Holford was staggered. Here was news that was little more than a whispered rumour at Scotland Yard.

"How the devil do you know that?" he blurted.

Mr Reeder's smile was one of self-depreciation.

"One picks up odd scraps of information," he said apologetically.

"I—I see wrong in everything. That is my curious perversion—I have a criminal mind!"

Holford drew a long breath.

"Well—there is nothing much doing. That Ealing case is pretty clear. Green is an ex-convict, who got a job at the bank during the war and worked up to manager. He has done seven years for conversion."

"Embezzlement and conversion," murmured Mr Reeder. "I—er—I'm afraid I was the principal witness against him. Bank crimes were rather—er—a hobby of mine. Yes, he got into difficulties with moneylenders. Very foolish—extremely foolish. And he doesn't admit his error." Mr Reeder sighed heavily. "Poor fellow! With his life at stake one may forgive and indeed condone his pitiful prevarications."

The inspector stared at the new man in amazement.

"I don't know that there is much 'poor fellow' about him. He has cashed £100,000 and told the weakest yarn that I've ever read—you'll find copies of the police reports here, if you'd like to read them. The scratches on Mallings's hand are curious—they've found several on the other hand. They are not deep enough to suggest a struggle. As to the yarn that Green tells——"

Mr. J. G. Reeder nodded sadly.

"It was not an ingenious story," he said, almost with regret. "If I remember rightly, his story was something like this: he had been recognised by a man who served in Dartmoor with him, and this fellow wrote a blackmailing letter telling him to pay or clear out. Sooner than return to a life of crime, Green wrote out all the facts to his directors, put the letter in the drawer of his desk with his keys, and left a note for his head cashier on the desk."

itself, intending to leave London and try to make a fresh start where he was unknown "

"There were no letters in or on the desk, and no keys," said the inspector decisively "The only true part of the yarn was that he had done time "

"Imprisonment," suggested Mr Reeder plaintively He had a horror of slang "Yes, that was true "

Left alone in his office, he spent a very considerable time at his private telephone, communing with the young person who was still a young person, although the passage of time had dealt unkindly with her For the rest of the morning he was reading the depositions which his predecessor had put on the desk

It was late in the afternoon when the Public Prosecutor strolled into his room and glanced at the big pile of manuscript through which his subordinate was wading

"What are you reading—the Green business?" he asked, with a note of satisfaction in his voice "I'm glad that is interesting you—though it seems a fairly straightforward case I have had a letter from the president of the man's bank, who for some reason seems to think Green was telling the truth "

Mr Reeder looked up with that pained expression of his which he invariably wore when he was puzzled

"Here is the evidence of Policeman Burnett," he said "Perhaps you can enlighten me, sir Policeman Burnett stated in his evidence—let me read it

"Some time before I reached the bank premises I saw a man standing at the corner of the street, immediately outside the bank I saw him distinctly in the light of a passing mail van I did not attach any importance to his presence, and I did not see him again It was possible for this man to have gone round the block and come to 120, Firling Avenue without being seen by me Immediately after I saw him, my foot struck against a piece of iron on the sidewalk I put my lamp on the object and found it was an old horse-shoe, I had seen children playing with this particular shoe earlier in the evening When I looked again towards the corner, the man had disappeared He would have seen the light of my lamp I saw no other person, and so far as I can remember, there was no light showing in Green's house when I passed it "

Mr Reeder looked up

"Well?" said the Prosecutor "There's nothing remarkable about that It was probably Green who dodged round the block and came in at the back of the constable "

Mr Reeder scratched his chin

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "ye-es " He shifted uncomfortably in his chair "Would it be considered indecorous if I made a few

inquiries, independent of the police?" he asked nervously "I should not like them to think that a mere dilettante was interfering with their lawful functions"

"By all means," said the Prosecutor heartily "Go down and see the officer in charge of the case I'll give you a note to him—it is by no means unusual for my officer to conduct a separate investigation, though I am afraid you will discover very little The ground has been well covered by Scotland Yard"

"It would be permissible to see the man?" hesitated Reeder

"Green? Why, of course! I will send you up the necessary order."

The light was fading from a grey, blustering sky, and rain was falling fitfully, when Mr Reeder, with his furled umbrella hooked to his arm, his coat collar turned up, stepped through the dark gateway of Brixton Prison and was led to the cell where a distracted man sat, his head upon his hands, his pale eyes gazing into vacancy

"It's true, it's true! Every word" Green almost sobbed the words

A pallid man, inclined to be bald, with a limp yellow moustache, going grey Reeder, with his extraordinary memory for faces, recognised him the moment he saw him, though it was some time before the recognition was mutual

"Yes, Mr Reeder, I remember you now You were the gentleman who caught me before But I've been as straight as a die I've never taken a farthing that didn't belong to me What my poor girl will think——"

"Are you married?" asked Mr Reeder sympathetically

"No, but I was going to be—rather late in life She's nearly thirty years younger than me, and the best girl that ever——"

Reeder listened to the rhapsody that followed, the melancholy deepening in his face

"She hasn't been into the court, thank God, but she knows the truth A friend of mine told me that she has been absolutely knocked out"

"Poor soul!" Mr Reeder shook his head

"It happened on her birthday, too," the man went on bitterly

"Did she know you were going away?"

"Yes, I told her the night before I'm not going to bring her into the case If we'd been properly engaged it would be different, but she's married and is divorcing her husband, but the decree hasn't been made absolute yet That's why I never went about with her or saw much of her And of course, nobody knew about our engagement, although we lived in the same street"

"Firling Avenue?" asked Reeder, and the bank manager nodded despondently

"She was married when she was seventeen to a brute. It was pretty galling for me, having to keep quiet about it—I mean, for nobody to know about our engagement. All sorts of rotten people were making up to her, and I had just to grind my teeth and say nothing. Impossible people! Why, that fool Burnett, who arrested me, he was sweet on her, used to write her poetry—you wouldn't think it possible in a policeman, would you?"

The outrageous incongruity of a poetical policeman did not seem to shock the detective.

"There is poetry in every soul, Mr. Green," he said gently, "and a policeman is a man."

Though he dismissed the eccentricity of the constable so lightly, the poetical policeman filled his mind all the way home to his house in the Brockley Road, and occupied his thoughts for the rest of his waking time.

It was a quarter to eight o'clock in the morning, and the world seemed entirely populated by milkmen and whistling newspaper boys, when Mr. J. G. Reeder came into Firling Avenue.

He stopped only for a second outside the bank, which had long since ceased to be an object of local awe and fearfulness, and pursued his way down the broad avenue. On either side of the thoroughfare ran a row of pretty villas—pretty although they bore a strong family resemblance to one another, each house with its little forecourt, sometimes laid out simply as a grass plot, sometimes decorated with flower-beds. Green's house was the eighteenth in the road on the right-hand side. Here he had lived with a cook-housekeeper, and apparently gardening was not his hobby, for the forecourt was covered with grass that had been allowed to grow at its will.

Before the twenty-sixth house in the road Mr. Reeder paused and gazed with mild interest at the blue blinds which covered every window. Evidently Miss Magda Grayne was a lover of flowers, for geraniums filled the window-boxes and were set at intervals along the tiny border under the bow window. In the centre of the grass plot was a circular flower-bed with one flowerless rose tree, the leaves of which were drooping and brown.

As he raised his eyes to the upper window, the blind went up slowly, and he was dimly conscious that there was a figure behind the white lace curtains. Mr. Reeder walked hurriedly away, as one caught in an immodest act, and resumed his peregrinations until he came to the big nursery gardener's which formed the corner lot at the far end of the road.

Here he stood for some time in contemplation, his arm resting on the iron railings, his eyes staring blankly at the vista of green-houses. He remained in this attitude so long that one of the nurserymen, not unnaturally thinking that a stranger was seeking

a way into the gardens, came over with the laborious gait of the man who wrings his living from the soil, and asked if he was wanting anybody

"Several people," sighed Mr Reeder, "several people!"

Leaving the resentful man to puzzle out his impertinence, he slowly retraced his steps. At No 412 he stopped again, opened the little iron gate and passed up the path to the front door. A small girl answered his knock and ushered him into the parlour.

The room was not well furnished, it was scarcely furnished at all. A strip of almost new linoleum covered the passage, the furniture of the parlour itself was made up of wicker chairs, a square of art carpet and a table. He heard the sound of feet above his head, feet on bare boards, and then presently the door opened and a girl came in.

She was pretty in a heavy way, but on her face he saw the marks of sorrow. It was pale and haggard, the eyes looked as though she had been recently weeping.

"Miss Magda Grayne?" he asked, rising as she came in.

She nodded.

"Are you from the police?" she asked quickly.

"Not exactly the police," he corrected carefully. "I hold an—er—an appointment in the office of the Public Prosecutor, which is analogous to, but distinct from, a position in the Metropolitan Police Force."

She frowned, and then

"I wondered if anybody would come to see me," she said. "Mr Green sent you?"

"Mr Green told me of your existence. He did not send me."

There came to her face in that second a look which almost startled him. Only for a fleeting space of time, the expression had dawned and passed almost before the untrained eye could detect its passage.

"I was expecting somebody to come," she said. Then "What made him do it?" she asked.

"You think he is guilty?"

"The police think so." She drew a long sigh. "I wish to God I had never seen—this place!"

He did not answer, his eyes were roving round the apartment. On a bamboo table was an old vase which had been clumsily filled with golden chrysanthemums, of a peculiarly beautiful variety. Not all, for amidst them flowered a large Michaelmas daisy that had the forlorn appearance of a parvenu that had strayed by mistake into noble company.

"You're fond of flowers?" he murmured.

She looked at the vase indifferently.

"Yes, I like flowers," she said "The girl put them in there " Then "Do you think they will hang him?"

The brutality of the question, put without hesitation, pained Reeder

"It is a very serious charge," he said And then "Have you a photograph of Mr Green?"

She frowned

"Yes, do you want it?"

He nodded

She had hardly left the room before he was at the bamboo table and had lifted out the flowers As he had seen through the glass, they were roughly tied with a piece of string He examined the ends, and here again his first observation had been correct none of these flowers had been cut, they had been plucked bodily from their stalks Beneath the string was the paper which had been first wrapped about the stalks It was a page torn from a notebook, he could see the red lines, but the pencilled writing was indecipherable

As her foot sounded on the stairs, he replaced the flowers in the vase, and when she came in he was looking through the window into the street

"Thank you," he said, as he took the photograph from her

It bore an affectionate inscription on the back

"You're married, he tells me, madam?"

"Yes, I am married, and practically divorced," she said shortly

"Have you been living here long?"

"About three months," she answered "It was his wish that I should live here "

He looked at the photograph again

"Do you know Constable Burnett?"

He saw a dull flush come to her face and die away again

"Yes, I know the sloppy fool!" she said viciously And then, realising that she had been surprised into an expression which was not altogether ladylike, she went on, in a softer tone "Mr Burnett is rather sentimental, and I don't like sentimental people, especially—well, you understand, Mr ——"

"Reeder," murmured that gentleman

"You understand, Mr Reeder, that when a girl is engaged and in my position, those kind of attentions are not very welcome "

Reeder was looking at her keenly Of her sorrow and distress there could be no doubt On the subject of the human emotions, and the ravages they make upon the human countenance, Mr Reeder was almost as great an authority as Mantegazza

"On your birthday," he said "How very sad! You were born on the seventeenth of October You are English, of course?"

"Yes, I'm English," she said shortly "I was born in Walworth—in Wallington I once lived in Walworth"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three," she answered

Mr Reeder took off his glasses and polished them on a large silk handkerchief

"The whole thing is inexpressibly sad," he said "I am glad to have had the opportunity of speaking with you, young lady I sympathise with you very deeply"

And in this unsatisfactory way he took his departure

She closed the door on him, saw him stop in the middle of the path and pick up something from a border bed, and wondered, frowning, why this middle-aged man had picked up the horseshoe she had thrown through the window the night before Into Mr Reeder's tail pocket went this piece of rusted steel and then he continued his thoughtful way to the nursery gardens, for he had a few questions to ask

The men of Section 10 were parading for duty when Mr Reeder came timidly into the charge room and produced his credentials to the inspector in charge

"Oh, yes, Mr Reeder," said that officer affably "We have had a note from the P P's office, and I think I had the pleasure of working with you on that big slush* case a few years ago Now what can I do for you?" Burnett? Yes, he's here"

He called the man's name and a young and good-looking officer stepped from the ranks

"He's the man who discovered the murder—he's marked for promotion," said the inspector "Burnett, this gentleman is from the Public Prosecutor's office and he wants a little talk with you Better use my office, Mr. Reeder"

The young policeman saluted and followed the shuffling figure into the privacy of the inspector's office He was a confident young man already his name and portrait had appeared in the newspapers, the hint of promotion had become almost an accomplished fact, and before his eyes was the prospect of a supreme achievement

"They tell me that you are something of a poet, officer," said Mr Reeder

Burnett blushed

"Why, yes, sir I write a bit," he confessed

"Love poems, yes?" asked the other gently "One finds time in the night—er—for such fancies And there is no inspiration like—er—love, officer"

Burnett's face was crimson

"I've done a bit of writing in the night, sir," he said, "though I've never neglected my duty"

* Slush=forged Bank of England Notes

"Naturally," murmured Mr Reeder "You have a poetical mind It was a poetical thought to pluck flowers in the middle of the night——"

"The nurseryman told me I could take any flowers I wanted," Burnett interrupted hastily "I did nothing wrong"

Reeder inclined his head in agreement

"That I know You picked the flowers in the dark—by the way, you inadvertently included a Michaelmas daisy with your chrysanthemums—tied up your little poem to them and left them on the doorstep with—er—a horseshoe I wondered what had become of that horseshoe"

"I threw them up on to her—to the lady's window-sill," corrected the uncomfortable young man "As a matter of fact, the idea didn't occur to me until I had passed the house——"

Mr Reeder's face was thrust forward

"This is what I want to confirm," he said softly "The idea of leaving the flowers did not occur to you until you had passed her house? The horseshoe suggested the thought? Then you went back, picked the flowers, tied them up with the little poem you had already written, and tossed them up to her window—we need not mention the lady's name"

Constable Burnett's face was a study

"I don't know how you guessed that, but it is a fact If I've done anything wrong——"

"It is never wrong to be in love," said Mr J G Reeder soberly "Love is a very beautiful experience—I have frequently read about it"

Miss Magda Grayne had dressed to go out for the afternoon and was putting on her hat, when she saw the queer man who had called so early that morning, walking up the tessellated path Behind him she recognised a detective engaged in the case The servant was out, nobody could be admitted except by herself She walked quickly behind the dressing-table into the bay of the window and glanced up and down the road Yes, there was a taxicab which usually accompanies such visitations, and, standing by the driver, another man, obviously a "busy"

She pulled up the overlay of her bed, took out the flat pad of bank-notes that she found, and thrust them into her handbag, then, stepping on tiptoe, she went out to the landing, into the unfurnished back room, and, opening the window, dropped to the flat roof of the kitchen In another minute she was in the garden and through the back gate A narrow passage divided the two lines of villas that backed on one another She was in High Street and had boarded a car before Mr Reeder grew tired of knocking To the best of his knowledge Mr Reeder never saw her again

II

At the Public Prosecutor's request, he called at his chief's house after dinner and told his surprising story

"Green, who had the unusual experience of being promoted to his position over the heads of his seniors, for special services he rendered during the war, was undoubtedly an ex-convict, and he spoke the truth when he said that he had received a letter from a man who had served a period of imprisonment with him. The name of his blackmailer is, or rather was, Arthur George Crater, whose other name was Mallings!"

"Not the night watchman?" said the Public Prosecutor, in amazement

Mr Reeder nodded

"Yes, sir, it was Arthur Mallings. His daughter, Miss Magda Crater, was, as she very truly said, born at Walworth on the 17th of October, 1900. She said Wallington after, but Walworth first. One observes that when people adopt false family names, they seldom change their given names, and the 'Magda' was easy to identify

"Evidently Mallings had planned this robbery of the bank very carefully. He had brought his daughter, in a false name, to Ealing, and had managed to get her introduced to Mr Green. Magda's job was to worm her way into Green's confidence and learn all that she could. Possibly it was part of her duty to secure casts of the keys. Whether Mallings recognised in the manager an old prison acquaintance, or whether he obtained the facts from the girl, we shall never know. But when the information came to him, he saw, in all probability, an opportunity of robbing the bank and of throwing suspicion upon the manager

"The girl's rôle was that of a woman who was to be divorced, and I must confess this puzzled me until I realised that in no circumstances would Mallings wish his daughter's name to be associated with the bank manager

"The night of the seventeenth was chosen for the raid. Mallings's plan to get rid of the manager had succeeded. He saw the letter on the table in Green's private office, read it, secured the keys—although he had in all probability a duplicate set—and at a favourable moment cleared as much portable money from the bank vaults as he could carry, hurried them round to the house in Firling Avenue, where they were buried in the central bed of the front garden, under a rose bush—I rather imagined there was something interfering with the nutrition of that unfortunate bush the first time I saw it. I can only hope that the tree is not altogether dead,

and I have given instructions that it shall be replanted and well fertilised ”

“Yes, yes,” said the Prosecutor, who was not at all interested in horticulture

“In planting the tree, as he did in some haste, Malling scratched his hand. Roses have thorns—I went to Ealing to find the rose bush that had scratched his hand. Hurrying back to the bank, he waited, knowing that Constable Burnett was due at a certain time. He had prepared the can of chloroform, the handcuffs and straps were waiting for him, and he stood at the corner of the street until he saw the flash of Burnett’s lamp, then, running into the bank and leaving the door ajar, he strapped himself, fastened the handcuffs and lay down, expecting that the policeman would arrive, find the open door and rescue him before much harm was done

“But Constable Burnett had had some pleasant exchanges with the daughter. Doubtless she had received instructions from her father to be as pleasant to him as possible. Burnett was a poetical young man, knew it was her birthday, and as he walked along the street his foot struck an old horseshoe and the idea occurred to him that he should return, attach the horseshoe to some flowers, which the nurseryman had given him permission to pick, and leave his little bouquet, so to speak, at his lady’s feet—a poetical idea, and one worthy of the finest traditions of the Metropolitan Police Force. This he did, but it took some time, and all the while this young man was philandering—Arthur Crater was dying!

“In a few seconds after lying down he must have passed from consciousness. The chloroform still dripped, and when the policeman eventually reached the bank, ten minutes after he was due, the man was dead!”

The Public Prosecutor sat back in his padded chair and frowned at his new subordinate

“How on earth did you piece together all this?” he asked in wonder

Mr Reeder shook his head sadly

“I have that perversion,” he said. “It is a terrible misfortune, but it is true. I see evil in everything—in dying rose bushes, in horseshoes—in poetry even. I have the mind of a criminal. It is deplorable!”

Superintendent Wilson

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PHILIP MANSFIELD

By

G D H & M COLE

JEVONS entered Wilson's sanctum and closed the door softly behind him.
"A lady to see you, sir," he said "She won't give her name"

Wilson groaned Of all his clients, he hated most distressed ladies who refused to give their names

"What sort of a lady?" he asked

"Well dressed, sir, about thirty, very quiet and pleasant looking, quite a lady, sir," said Jevons, who had been trained to tell his employer what he wanted to know in as few words as possible
"She is very much upset," he added

Wilson thrust from him the papers—a dull case—at which he was working "Send her in," he said, "but tell her I'm very busy" He rose from his chair

A moment later he was shaking hands with a tall, good-looking woman, well but soberly dressed, whose face he faintly remembered, but whom he could not name or place in his memory

"I have met you before," he said, "Mrs ——?" His eye had noticed the wedding ring and keeper bulging through the glove

"Mansfield," said the lady "You saw me just for a moment when I came here to call for my husband last week"

"Of course," said Wilson, "Your husband was to have come to see me this morning I hope there is nothing——"

"Oh, Mr Wilson," said the lady, "my husband has disappeared I am sure there is something wrong" He could see the excitement and distress his visitor was holding back

"Disappeared!" said Wilson "Sit down here and tell me all about it"

"You know nothing?"

"My dear lady, I can hardly believe what you tell me"

"Oh, I hoped against hope you might know My husband consulted you last week" Mrs Mansfield paused "He did not tell me what it was about"

"It was about a business trouble, madam, but I cannot see at present how it can have any connection with his disappearance. Suppose you tell me what has happened in your own way. Take your time, and omit nothing that can possibly be of importance, even if you do not see its connection with this affair."

While the visitor told her tale, Wilson sat at his table, with eyes closed and the tips of his long, slender fingers pressed tightly together. His legs were thrust out before him. Save by putting an occasional question, he gave no sign of the impression which the narrative made on him.

"It happened only last night," said Mrs Mansfield. "My husband came home just as usual, but I could tell that something was worrying him. He kept humming a tune softly under his breath, as he does when he is upset. We had dinner quietly together, and he was quite his normal self, except perhaps that he talked rather less than usual. We had finished dinner when a note was brought in by the parlour-maid. It was from Tom Pointer, who is Phil's greatest friend in Hampstead. You have probably heard of him."

"The theatrical manager?" asked Wilson. The paunchy figure of the great producer of popular musical comedies came at once into his mind's eye.

Mrs Mansfield nodded. "Yes, he is a great friend of my husband's. This note from him was to ask Phil to go down and join a men's bridge four at his house. The house is only a few minutes away, the other side of the Spaniards' Way, and, as it was a fine night, Phil went off just as he was, without even a hat or coat. He told me not to sit up for him, as he might be late. So, at about eleven, I went to bed, and it wasn't till I woke up this morning that I found he hadn't come back. I got up at once and went to the telephone and rang up Mr Pointer. He was apparently still in bed, but they fetched him to the telephone. I asked what had happened to Phil. He seemed very surprised and asked what was wrong. I asked whether Phil wasn't still in his house, or when he had left. Tom seemed puzzled, and it came out that Phil had never been there at all. And, Mr Wilson, Tom absolutely denied that he had written any letter to Phil last night, and said he had been out all the evening. I dressed quickly and went round to see him. And that's what he tells me. Phil never went to his house, and he didn't write any note inviting him."

"Have you the note that your husband received?"

"No. Phil took it away in his pocket."

"Did you see it? Was it Mr Pointer's writing?"

"It looked just like his, but I suppose it can't have been. Oh, Mr Wilson, whoever can have lured my husband away?"

"My dear lady, there are half a hundred possible explanations,

but I can't tell yet which is the right one What did you do when you had seen Mr Pointer?"

"I went to the police station and told them all about it Then I remembered that my husband had consulted you, and came here at once to see if you knew anything about it"

"Did you tell Mr Pointer where you were going?"

"About the police, yes He advised me to go to the station In fact, he offered to go with me, but he wasn't properly dressed, and I wanted to go at once I've just come on to you from the police station now"

Wilson asked what the police inspector had said about the case He had, Mrs Mansfield said, asked her a great many questions and promised to make full inquiries into the case But—she hesitated—he had seemed rather as if he supposed her husband's disappearance would clear itself up in due course

"I believe," she said, "he thought Phil had gone away of his own free will"

Wilson made no reply to this It was, indeed, quite a possible explanation Instead, he asked her whether Tom Pointer had told her where he had been the night before when, as he said, he had been out the whole evening Yes, Pointer had said that he had dined at Verney's, and then gone on to the first night of a new film *The Dearth of a Notion*, at the Loggia

'Was he alone?"

"Oh, Mr Wilson, you can't suspect Tom Pointer of having anything to do with this He's Phil's greatest friend"

Wilson could quite well imagine circumstances in which a husband's greatest friend might help him to disappear quietly from his wife But he did not tell Mrs Mansfield this, nor did the explanation seem, on the face of it, to cover the facts as he knew them

"My dear lady, I suspect no one," he said "Equally I suspect everybody It is far too early to begin making up one's mind"

"Well, said Mrs Mansfield decisively, "I'm certain Tom Pointer hadn't anything to do with it And he wasn't alone He told me that his brother, Mr Adolphus Pointer, was with him"

"That, I suppose, is the Adolphus Pointer who is your husband's producer?"

"Yes"

"What time did your husband leave home?"

"About nine o'clock It would only take him three minutes to get to Tom's house"

"I see Will you give me both addresses?"

"Our house is The Haven, Heathwood Road The Pointers live at Lawnwood, a house standing in its own grounds right at the edge of the Heath, near North End Road"

"How," Wilson asked finally, "was your husband dressed when he left?"

In his ordinary office suit of gray tweeds, it appeared, the only distinctive thing about his attire being a diamond scarf pin which he always wore. And nothing that the lady could tell him gave Wilson any further light. Mrs. Mansfield apparently did not know what had been troubling her husband, though she thought he had been worried more than once of late. She knew nothing either of monetary troubles or of personal cares that could have seriously upset him. She made it clear that to the best of her belief she and Phil, who had been married only two years, were wrapped up in each other, and in their only child, now aged just under a year. Wilson sent her back to her boy, cheering her with the hope that there was really nothing wrong, and that her husband might return at any moment. But he had serious doubts. When she had gone, he sat down again to think the case out quietly for himself. Had it any connection with the matter of which Mansfield had consulted him a fortnight before? It might have, or it might not. Philip Mansfield, a very clever actor who somehow never got the "star" parts and was always praised for the perfect finish with which he played the secondary characters, had married, two years before, a lady with a considerable fortune. With his wife's money he had embarked on management, playing the leading rôle in several plays which the public shunned, though both the plays and the acting were enthusiastically praised by the critics. Mansfield had lost money over the ventures, and he had lost more than the comparative failure of the plays was enough to account for. He had gone into the position and had discovered that he was being systematically cheated. He had called in an accountant, with whose aid he had narrowed down the suspicion of guilt to two men, his manager and his producer, either or both of whom might be implicated. The manager's name was Foster, the producer was Adolphus Pointer, brother of the Tom Pointer whom he had set out to visit the night before.

Before taking steps against either of the two, or saying anything of his suspicions, Mansfield had come to Wilson and asked him to take the case in hand. Wilson had been actually reading, when Mrs. Mansfield was announced, the report of one of his subordinates proving that both Foster and Adolphus Pointer were heavily implicated in the frauds. But, even if either or both had gained an inkling of Mansfield's suspicions, it seemed rather drastic to go to the length of murdering or kidnapping him, besides being in all probability useless. And it was even less likely that a man of Tom Pointer's standing and reputation should be connected with anything of the sort. Wilson was perplexed but he saw his next steps clearly enough.

He first lunched at Verney's, and established the fact that both Tom and Adolphus Pointer had been there together from 7 to 8.30 on the previous evening. Proceeding to the Loggia Theatre, he found from the attendant that Tom Pointer and another man, who was probably, but not certainly, his brother, had booked and entered there at twenty to nine, about ten minutes before the big film began. It was a little unfortunate perhaps that, as they had chosen a movie and not a theatre, Wilson was unable to find any one who had actually seen them either sitting inside or departing. But, unless they had been deliberately faking an alibi, they were hardly likely to leave at least until the big picture had ended.

Wilson took no further steps until darkness had fallen, when he went up to the crest of Hampstead Heath and took a look at the house where the two Pointer brothers lived together. It was quite a small house in itself, standing just off the Golder's Green side of the Spaniards' Way, just beyond the Golder's Green turning. It abutted, however, on the grounds of a much larger and older house, from which the smaller property had probably at some time been cut off. Before investigating further, Wilson crossed the road and traversed the two or three hundred yards which divided him from Heathwood Road. Almost at its top, looking down on the Vale of Heath, stood the Mansfields' house. Could a man be kidnapped between the two at nine o'clock of a spring evening? It was just possible, Wilson decided, but so unlikely that every other possibility ought to be tried first. Accordingly, he returned to Lawnwood, and, having slipped close to the house in the shadow of some bushes and waited till all lights were safely out, he set about effecting an entrance. This gave him singularly little difficulty, the mere forcing of a conservatory door with a piece of bent wire sufficing to let him in. Moving very softly, and using an electric torch with extreme care, he searched the whole of the ground floor, looking for some trace either of Mansfield's presence the night before or the complicity of either brother in his disappearance, but finding nothing. He was just about to abandon the search when his torch lit up something gleaming in the folds of one of a pair of curtains which could be drawn so as to separate the entrance hall from the lounge hall at the back of the house. On examination, he found that the gleam came from a diamond scarf pin in the curtain.

For a second or two he remained gazing at it. From Mrs Mansfield's description he was pretty certain that it was Mansfield's pin, and that, therefore, Mansfield had been in the house the preceding evening. But, if so, where was he now? His thoughts had got so far when they were interrupted by the sound of a door opening above. With great rapidity he moved the cur-

tain folds so as to hide the pin, and retreated to the garden by the way he had entered. There he remained, concealed in the bushes, while two or three men appeared and set about a search of the ground-floor premises. They even opened the conservatory door and stood for a moment looking into the garden and talking in low tones, but to Wilson's great relief they returned to the house without searching further. Possibly, however, they had gone to ring up the police, in which case he would have to be quick. He did not want to meet the police at this stage.

He considered carefully. Presuming that Mansfield had been lured to the house either by the brothers or by some one using their name, he thought it exceedingly unlikely that he was still here. Lawnwood was so obviously the first place to be searched on his disappearance. But then, where was he? First, he might have been killed, or merely be held in captivity. Then, dead or alive, he might have either been hidden in the vicinity or taken away, probably by car, to some distance. For traces either of burial or transport by road one would have to search by daylight, there remained the possibility of a live man's being concealed somewhere near by.

At once Wilson's mind leapt to the big silent bulk of North House next door. He knew about North House, from which the Lawnwood grounds appeared to have been cut off. Named from the Lord North who was supposed to have stayed there in the eighteenth century, looking down from its windows on Chatham in his retirement at Pitt House below, it had been owned by Sir Ernest Percy-Hotham, the ambassador at Prague, but since his death had been untenanted, unless by caretakers. If empty now, it would provide a splendid temporary repository for unwanted actor-managers.

Wilson moved to the boundary wall which separated the grounds of the two houses and began searching. For some time he got no result, the path which ran alongside the wall being too hard to show traces. After a little while, however, he came to a spot where his torch showed him that the ivy which covered the coping had been dragged down and torn. He moved a little farther along and climbed the wall. On the far side were the remnants of a flower bed, scarred with freshly-made footprints, of which some, certainly, were unusually deep. *Some* people, at all events, had crossed the wall at that point within the last day or so, and one at least of that number had been carrying a heavy weight.

Very softly Wilson made his way to the dark silent bulk of North House. At the farther end a couple of lighted windows suggested caretakers still about. Wilson waited until the light disappeared, and then set about his second burglary of the evening. It was not nearly so easy as the first, but at length, having climbed

on the flat roof of a projecting billiard-room, he succeeded in forcing a window. Knowing how hard it is to move soundlessly on bare boards, he muffled his feet with wraps he had brought with him and began creeping through the long rooms. Nothing but shuttered emptiness greeted him, till at length he reached a green baize door which looked as if it gave on to caretakers' premises. These, he thought, were best observed from the outside, and accordingly he descended to the ground floor, pausing by an unshuttered window and wondering whether he should get out that way.

As he stood, he was amazed to see a light, obviously from the house, shine suddenly on to the grass, while at the same time the faint sounds of feet and voices were audible through the window. It appeared that the source of both light and sounds was round the angle of the house, and so great was his desire to learn what was going on that he took the risk of opening the window—fortunately it opened quietly—and slipping out. Gluing himself to the wall, he crept along till he could see a man standing in a lighted square of lawn and looking up at the house.

"Come down," said the man in what sounded like an exasperated whisper.

A minute later a door was unbarred.

"What's up?" said an educated voice, which certainly belonged to no ordinary caretaker.

"Dolly's got the wind up," said the first man. "Some one's broken into Lawnwood, and nothing's been taken. Dolly thinks it's the police searching on the quiet, so I've pretended to go off and tell the station, and you're to get *him* away at once in the car and drop him somewhere well out in the country. It won't matter if he's found to-morrow. Drive out anywhere, about fifty miles, and dump him where you won't be noticed, see?"

"I don't think," said the voice. "Why can't Dolly do his own dirty work? Catch me driving fifty miles with that in the car. Not me!"

"Oh, if you prefer to have the police find you here with him, I've no more to say."

"I tell you, Foster," the man grumbled, "I don't like it. I've half a mind to clear out and leave him."

"Don't be a fool," said Foster. "What's the use of leaving a job half done?"

"Damn it all, can't you come too?" said the other. "It isn't a one-man job."

"Can't," said Foster. "He knows me. Is he safe now?"

"Quite. Tied him up myself."

"He doesn't know where he is?"

"Not on your life. I told him he's in Yorkshire." He sang to

a popular tune, with a remarkably good voice, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise"

"Shut up, man," said Foster hurriedly

"Lead on, Macduff," said the other

"Well, give him another of his pills. We don't want him singing out in the car. Then I'll help you carry him down. Be quick, man."

Wilson heard the first man retire into the house, while Foster waited for him on the lawn. Soon a voice called from the window

"All serene," it said. "Come and help me down with him."

Wilson remained crouching against the wall, until he heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming downstairs and out of the door. Then he crept to the corner and, peeping round, saw two men, carrying a stretcher, cross the lawn in the direction of the drive. He followed as close as he dared. After a little while Foster stopped.

"Don't think we'll risk carrying him out to the road," he said. "I'll bring the car up." He lowered his end of the stretcher.

"Well, buck up," said the other. "I'm getting fed up with this game."

Foster went off among the trees, leaving the other man pacing uneasily to and fro by the stretcher. In half a minute Wilson, with revolver cocked, stepped out of his bush.

"Hullo!" the other gasped. "What's this?"

"S-s-sh!" said Wilson, allowing the muzzle of his gun to show for a second. "Don't make a sound, if you value your life." Keeping the man covered, he stepped up to the stretcher, and saw Philip Mansfield's white, unconscious face lying in it.

"What in hell's this?" the captor muttered. "Are you the cops?"

"Never you mind," Wilson said. "The point for you to take in is that the game's up. I know all about this hanky-panky, and I'm taking Mansfield back with me now. And if you value your skin you're going to help me." The man was staring at him in goggle-eyed surprise. "What you have to do is this. When Foster comes back you're not to say a word about this to him, but get Mansfield and yourself into the car. *But* you're to make some excuse for getting Foster's back turned while I get in as well. Then you'll drive where I tell you. I'm a good shot, by the way, and I shall be covering you. But if you do what I tell you, there's a chance of your own part in this affair getting looked at lightly." The man said nothing. "Quick," said Wilson. "Make up your mind."

"If you are a cop——" said the man. "Will you swear it's O.K.?"

"Of course," said Wilson in slight perplexity.

The man shrugged his shoulders

"Oh, very well You've got 'em on me, comrade" There was a note almost of relief in his voice, Wilson thought, as he himself retreated rapidly to his bush The car came up, and Foster helped his companion lift the stretcher into it

"You know your job now," he said "He's not to turn up before to-morrow evening Drive him well out and leave him If you like to give him a tap on the head before you say good-bye it won't do any harm"

"I know my job, thanks," the other returned "But I wish you'd go up to the house and lock up I've left the light on, and I think it's visible from the road"

"You are a careless idiot," grumbled the other But he went back to the lawn, and Wilson came out of his bush

"Hampstead General Hospital," he said to the driver, "as quick as you can Rosslyn Hill, on the left I'm getting in behind But I shall be covering you still, so mind you run straight Lights on"

"Right, guv'nor," said the man, and the car shot forward With his unoccupied hand Wilson cut his client's bonds, and did what he could to make him comfortable He was still completely unconscious In a few minutes they stopped outside the hospital

"The doctor in charge, at once," Wilson said "It's urgent" In a minute he was helping a hospital orderly to carry Philip Mansfield in at the door Then he turned back to the driver But that worthy had no desire to see any more of him He had kept his engine running and the instant Mansfield's body was safely out of the car he put her into gear and drove off as fast as he could go Wilson gave a shout after him, and then, seeing it was useless, made for the telephone But it took him a full minute to get the Rosslyn Hill police station, and another minute to explain that he wanted XP 7056 stopped at once He had little hope that it would be stopped before the driver abandoned it But he had the number, unless it was a false one, and could easily find out whose it was All the same, it was a pity losing the driver like that A few minutes' talk with him would probably have cleared up the whole case And now the odds were that the fellow had gone off to give his accomplice full warning

Wilson, leaving Mansfield in the hospital's care, ran at full speed to the police station Just outside he picked up a late taxi returning from depositing a fare Bidding the man wait he dashed into the station and breathlessly explained his business He had to tell part of his tale in order to get the police to move, and then it took full five minutes to get the men he wanted ready to start But at last a police sergeant and a constable climbed into the taxi with him, and set off at full speed for the Pointers' house

The front of Lawnwood was all in darkness and there was no sign of the car

"We shall now see," said Wilson, "whether our friend has slipped straight off, or been up here first to warn his confederates "

The police sergeant gave a resounding knock at the door There was a brief silence, and then it was opened by Tom Pointer himself

"Well, that's pretty smart work!" he exclaimed, seeing the uniforms "Where's Foster?" The sergeant making no reply, Wilson intervened

"Do you mind telling us the number of your car?" he asked

"My car!" Pointer stared "What on earth do you want to know about that for? As a matter of fact, it's XP 7056 "

"Is it in the garage?" Wilson went on

"You're devilish inquisitive," Pointer answered "No, it isn't I lent it to a friend for the night "

"What's your friend's name?"

"Foster, though what it has to do with——"

"To Foster?" Wilson turned to the sergeant "That's the other—not the driver "

"Look here," said Pointer "If you've got something to say, hadn't you better come inside and say it, instead of keeping me standing on the doorstep? At present, I don't mind telling you I haven't the ghost of an idea what you're driving at "

They filed in after him, into the very smoking-room which Wilson had burgled about an hour before Tom Pointer splashed out drinks

"Now then, what's all this about?" he asked

"It's about Philip Mansfield," said Wilson

"Well, what about him? I haven't got him here Haven't seen him for some days Isn't he found yet?"

"When did you see him last?"

"Three days ago "

"You wrote him a note last night " But this Tom Pointer strenuously denied

"None the less Philip Mansfield was in this house last night Do you deny knowledge of this fact?"

"What rubbish is this? Of course, he wasn't here "

"Mr Pointer, will you come over here a moment?" Tom Pointer, surprised, followed Wilson across to the curtain Wilson drew the folds aside, and revealed the scarf pin still sticking in it "Then how did that get here?"

Pointer bent down and drew it out "Good God!" he said "it's Philip's " He seemed thoroughly discomposed "I can't explain it at all," he added, "but how did you know it was there?"

"Because," said Wilson equably "I took the liberty of burgling your house earlier in the evening "

"Look here," Pointer answered, "who the devil are you? A policeman?"

"My name is Wilson I am engaged by Mrs Mansfield to look into her husband's disappearance "

"Are you *the* Wilson?"

"I believe I am And I should like to know how you explain the presence of Mr Mansfield's scarf pin in your curtain "

"I don't explain it," said Pointer "If Mansfield was in my house last night, it was not at my invitation I was out all the evening "

"What time did you return home?"

"About midnight " At first Tom Pointer had seemed disposed to resent this cross-examination, but the discovery of the scarf pin had taken all the resistance out of him, and substituted what might have been either mere bewilderment or the embarrassment of guilt Wilson fancied that it was the former, but he was not sure

"Was your brother with you all the evening?" he asked

"Yes Why? As a matter of fact, we didn't part till after eleven o'clock—just before I went home "

"At the Loggia cinema?"

"You seem to know the hell of a lot," said Pointer "No, we went on from there to the Café Royal I left him there But what's he got to do with this?"

"Have you seen him since?" Wilson asked

"Yes In fact, he's in the house now "

"Can we have a few words with him now?"

Pointer, still apparently bewildered, went out to fetch his brother But a minute or two later he came back alone, looking more perplexed than ever

"He seems to have gone," he said, "and he was staying the night I can't make it out "

Wilson asked whether Foster also had been in the house

"Yes," said Tom Pointer, "he came with my brother But he left some time ago to go to the police station But what in hell is all this about?"

"Mr Pointer," said Wilson, "there is no doubt at all that Philip Mansfield was lured to your house last night by a note which he believed to be in your writing Here in this room he was kidnapped and his captors drugged him and carried him away He was imprisoned in the big house next door, and was this evening driven away from there in an unconscious condition, at the orders of your friend Foster We should therefore like to know what you have to say about it "

While Wilson was speaking, an expression of increasing consternation overspread Tom Pointer's countenance

"It can't be true," he said

"Unfortunately," said Wilson, "it is quite true. And, in the circumstances, the sergeant here will have to ask you to hold yourself at the disposal of the police."

"Sorry, sir, but that's right, sir," said the hitherto silent representative of the police.

"But, I assure you, I don't know a single thing about it," Tom Pointer rejoined.

"Well, sergeant, we've done all we can here," said Wilson. "Perhaps you will kindly take down Mr. Pointer's statement and get him to sign it. I must be going." With a few words more, he left Lawnwood and returned at once to the hospital. Mansfield, he found, was still unconscious, and no statement could yet be obtained from him. A few minutes later Wilson was rousing the occupants of The Haven, Heathfield Road. Mrs. Mansfield came to an upper window in reply to his knocks.

"It is I—Wilson. All is well. Will you come down as soon as you can?"

"You have found Phil? Is he alive?"

"Alive, and scarcely hurt," said Wilson, "Come down and I'll explain."

"Thank God," said Mrs. Mansfield, and a minute or two later she appeared at the front door and let Wilson into the house.

As rapidly as he could, Wilson sketched what had happened. He cut short Mrs. Mansfield's fervent thanks. "We've not finished yet," he said. "Your husband, the doctor tells me, is in no way seriously hurt, but he may remain unconscious for some hours, and be too weak to be disturbed when he comes to. Now, clearly these men had some special reason for wanting him out of the way till to-morrow evening—I mean this evening—that is clear from what I heard Foster say. I don't know what their reason was, but unless I do I can't be sure of spoiling their plans."

"Can't you arrest them? Have you told the police?"

"I went straight to the police from the hospital?" and they are hunting for Foster and Adolphus Pointer. I hope they will get on their track at once. But, unless I know what their plot is, I can't be sure that even their arrest will stop it. I want you to think, Mrs. Mansfield. Is there any conceivable reason why Foster or Pointer, or any one else, should want your husband out of the way till midday to-morrow?"

"I don't know, Mr. Wilson. I don't understand at all."

"Perhaps," said Wilson, "it may help you to remember if I tell you what Mr. Mansfield came to consult me about before he disappeared. He had discovered that he had been defrauded over his

management of the Megatherium, and with my assistance he had narrowed down the search for the guilty man to Foster or Adolphus Pointer or both. The day before yesterday, in answer to a letter of mine sending him some additional proofs, I got a note saying that he must think the whole thing over carefully before acting. The same night he vanishes from the Pointers' house, and twenty-four hours later I find him unconscious in a car brought up by Foster under the orders of Adolphus Pointer. Does that help you at all?"

Mrs Mansfield's expression had passed through every variety of amazement during this abrupt statement, but she appeared none the wiser.

"I don't know of anything that was to happen to-morrow. Phil didn't tell me, if there was."

Wilson tried a last forlorn chance.

"Was there *nothing at all* due to happen to-morrow to you or your husband? Something even that might be quite unconnected with this?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You're *certain*? Think as hard as you can."

"The only thing I can think of," said Mrs Mansfield, "and that's absurd, was that my sister left a letter here two days ago which she made me promise I wouldn't open till to-morrow evening."

Wilson thought "Absurd or not, you must open it now," he said "We can't run risks."

"But ought I to, when I promised?"

"Under the circumstances, I think you certainly should," said Wilson gravely.

"It seems rather mean," said Mrs Mansfield, but she went to her bureau and took out a letter. As she read it she gave a horrified exclamation.

"What is it?" Wilson asked.

"My sister is going to marry Dolly Pointer to-morrow—I mean, this morning," she gasped. "She wouldn't tell me, she says, because Phil would try and stop it. I suppose he would, if what you say is true. But—what can that have to do with——?"

"Has your sister any money?"

"Two thousand a year of her own."

"Yes. Well—and your husband might not be anxious to prosecute his brother-in-law for fraud," Wilson said. "Well, we can stop that bit, anyway. What is your sister's address?"

Mrs Mansfield gave it. "But—*Dolly Pointer*," she said in a bewildered tone, "I can hardly believe it. Why, we know him quite well."

"How exactly do we stand?" said Inspector Blaikie of Scotland Yard when Wilson went to see him the next morning. "Of course, it's easy enough to see more or less what happened, but how are we placed for getting a conviction? We've got Adolphus Pointer and Foster, and we can get Tom Pointer if we want him, but we've not got the other man, and we've really no idea who he is. And, as I see it, I'm doubtful if we've enough to be sure of a conviction. First, you say you think Tom Pointer's out of it, but we've got his letter we found in Mansfield's pocket, and our handwriting people say there's no doubt he wrote it. Against Foster we've your evidence, but nothing else. Mansfield never saw him when he was in captivity. And against Adolphus Pointer we've really nothing beyond your evidence of what Foster said about him in your hearing, and, of course, the fact that Mansfield's temporary disappearance was mighty convenient for him. Is it good enough? That's what worries me. Of course, he and Foster will both be prosecuted for fraud on the other business, but I'd rather like to give them a hint that kidnapping isn't a proper way to get out of corners."

"We want the other man to talk, in fact," said Wilson. "Well, we'll have to do our best. D'you feel like coming with me to the matinée of Tom Pointer's play, *The Gay Young Things*, this afternoon, Blaikie?"

"No, why? Pretty fair tripe, isn't it?"

"Absolutely rotten. I saw it last week. But come—with a warrant."

Blaikie sat up suddenly in his chair.

"A warrant," he exclaimed. "In whose name, please? You've got something up your sleeve."

"Make it out in the name of Henry Rubinstein, Blaikie."

"Never heard of him," said the inspector, "but have it your own way."

Blaikie surveyed his programme with care. No one of the name of Rubinstein appeared among the actors. He watched Wilson as much as he watched the play. He was sure Wilson was waiting for something. A young actor, Douglas Gordon, with a remarkably good voice, was singing the song whose refrain all London was humming, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

"Come on, Blaikie," said Wilson, and guided the inspector swiftly behind the scenes. The act was just ending.

"Look at your programme," said Wilson, "Henry Rubinstein is the private name of Douglas Gordon. The warrant, Blaikie Quick, before he's off."

"Henry Rubinstein," said Blaikie, "I arrest you for being concerned in the assault upon and the abduction of Philip Mansfield. And I warn you—"

The young actor had started back as the inspector began to speak. His eyes fell on Wilson.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "I thought you offered me a get-away. Well, it looks like a clean cop." He appeared to take his troubles lightly. "But how did you trail me?"

"It all came of singing at your work, Mr. Rubinstein," Wilson sang softly, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The actor stared.

"Good Lord! Did I sing that tripe last night?"

"You did, and I thought your voice familiar at the time. But it was not till this morning that it came over me who you must be."

"Well, you've got me," said Rubinstein. "Congratulations."

"I'm glad you take it so well," Wilson answered, "and as I don't suppose you want a term in gaol, you'd better tell me all about it, and agree to give evidence for the Crown."

"Oh, no," said the young man. "That would be spoiling sport." He glanced at his watch with a mischievous look. But he changed his tune when Wilson told him of Dolly Pointer's defalcations, of which he had known nothing, and of his plan to marry into Mansfield's family, and so secure himself against prosecution. He had been told only that Mansfield was putting unreasonable objections in the way of Pointer's marriage, and needed to be kept safely out of the way until it was an accomplished fact. No violence, he declared, had ever been meant, so far as he was concerned. He had only undertaken to help in kidnapping Mansfield and keeping him safe till the marriage was over. But, when Mansfield had offered unexpected resistance in Tom Pointer's smoking-room, and had been near getting away, Foster had hit him over the head and knocked him out. Rubinstein said he had protested, but had not seen how to stop half-way. He had helped Foster tie Mansfield up, but somehow he must have recovered consciousness enough before this was done to stick his tie pin into the curtain as a clue for the investigators of his disappearance to follow. Thereafter, Foster and Rubinstein had carried him across to the empty house, and Rubinstein had stayed with him until Foster arrived and ordered his removal to the car.

Wilson, as he listened to the actor's story, began to fear that even now he had secured no definite evidence of Dolly Pointer's part in the conspiracy, beyond the fact that he could be shown to have borrowed the car from his brother. He asked from whom Rubinstein had received his instructions.

"Why, I thought you knew—from Dolly Pointer, of course. He arranged it all."

"And Tom Pointer," Wilson asked. "Was he in it?"

"Not on your life Tom's not that sort. Dolly never meant him to learn anything about it"

"Then how about the note in his handwriting—the one that was used to decoy Mansfield to Lawnwood?"

Rubinstein laughed "Oh, that's simple," he said "It was a perfectly genuine note which Dolly found lying about in a blotter at Lawnwood and collared Tom Pointer had written it some time and then not sent it And it came in mighty handy But, I say!" he looked up from his watch in horror "He'll have *married* the girl by now Foster was to have been his best man What a mucky thing to do!"

"Oh, we stopped that, for the moment," Wilson said "But we want your help to stop it for good"

His help and that of Philip Mansfield were in great evidence when the conspirators were tried for kidnapping Mansfield, as soon as he was well enough to speak, fully corroborated Rubinstein's evidence and Wilson's connection, even to his having stuck his scarf pin in the curtain as a last desperate attempt to leave a clue of his whereabouts

Adolphus Pointer, still unmarried, fought hard, on the strength of his alibi, to show that the crime had been planned by Foster without his knowledge Foster, on the other hand, declared that he had been only a tool in Adolphus Pointer's hands, and was able to prove that Pointer had got the lion's share of the stolen money But, apart from this, Rubinstein's evidence was fatal to him Adolphus Pointer is at present reposing in a very safe place Foster, who got a less severe sentence, will be out again soon, and Rubinstein was discharged with a caution He at any rate is not likely to play such dangerous games again Indeed, he has become quite a friend of Wilson's, and that influence will probably keep him steady Tom Pointer and the Mansfields are as fast friends as ever, and Wilson, when he runs into any of them, which happens quite often, expresses the wish that all his cases would work out as smoothly as the Disappearance of Philip Mansfield

Inspector McLean

THE SIAMESE CAT

By

GEORGE GOODCHILD

ONE of McLean's most interesting cases was brought to light by no more intelligent a creature than a Siamese cat. It was on a bitterly cold night towards the end of January when a Mr Andrew Goff was awakened from sleep by the plaintive mewling of a cat, and, believing it to be his own cat in trouble, he slipped on a dressing-gown, muttered a few curses, and went downstairs.

In the kitchen he found his own fat animal asleep before what was left of the fire, and apparently indifferent to the misery of any feline cousin. Goff was not so great a lover of cats as to feel like engaging in a hunt round his garden, and he was about to turn out the light and seek his comfortable bed when a plaintive wail came from the direction of the kitchen window. The curtain was partly drawn, and he plainly saw a cat on the window-sill pawing the window.

Possibly it was the snow on the animal's back which melted his heart, for he changed his mind, opened the kitchen door, and finally persuaded the cat to enter. Mr Goff had not seen a Siamese cat for many years, and was momentarily overwhelmed by the curious shape of the eyes, which looked frightfully crossed. Then he noticed that the creature was very emaciated and so weak it could scarcely walk.

"Well, well!" he muttered. "I guess we can spare a drop of milk."

The milk which he poured into a saucer was eagerly lapped up, and Mr Goff wondered whether he should put the cat outside again. But its condition aroused his deepest sympathy, and he finally decided to give it the freedom of the kitchen and to remove his own cat to slightly less comfortable quarters.

The following morning Mrs Goff heard of the new arrival, and immediately took an interest in it, but, like her husband, she had no idea to whom it belonged.

"The poor thing's half starved, Jim," she said. "It's a valuable cat, too. Don't you think his eyes are wonderful?"

"Uncanny," said her husband. "Ill omen, if you ask me."

"It isn't only black cats that are lucky"

"Well, we'll have to try and find the owner"

Inquiries were made in the neighbouring houses, but no one appeared to know who owned the cat, and Mrs Goff was wondering whether she would be allowed to keep it, since it seemed to get on very well with her own animal. But her hopes were dashed to the ground a day later when a tradesman said he had seen the cat at a house called Southlands, where he had delivered a load of coal about a week before. It was situated about a mile from Mr Goff's cottage, and an old gentleman named Tollinger lived there.

Mrs Goff was a trifle disappointed, but her husband did not share her disappointment, feeling that one cat in a house was quite sufficient. He decided to walk over to Southlands during the afternoon, and with him he took the Siamese cat in a basket. He knew the house quite well, but to the best of his knowledge had never seen Mr Tollinger, although he had known the tenants who occupied it before Mr Tollinger came to the district.

It was not a very attractive house, for in the past various trees and heavy shrubs had been planted far too near it, and these had been allowed to get out of control, and shrouded the quite small building. Ivy, too, had grown over some of the windows, and the paths were full of grass and moss.

Mr Goff went first to the front door, and rang a number of times without getting any response. He then tried the back door, and finally came to the conclusion that no one was at home. So he took back the cat, much to his wife's delight, and made another call the following morning—with the same negative result as before.

A little disgruntled by his two fruitless visits, he made home again, but happened to meet the village constable in a lane, to whom he told his trouble.

"I don't think Mr Tollinger can be away," said the constable. "Because he would have asked us to keep an eye on the house. He's done that on several occasions. I'll make some inquiries in the village."

The result of the constable's inquiries was that the milkboy had found a slip of paper on the doorstep five days before marked, "No milk until further notice," which made it appear that Tollinger had gone away. But the grocer had not been informed of this, and was wondering why he had not received his weekly list, which usually reached him on Thursdays—and it was now Friday. Then there was the curious absence of the maid. She could be accounted for if indeed Mr Tollinger had gone away for any long period. But had he? The maidservant had come from another district, and no one knew her address. But the cat was definitely proved to belong to Mr Tollinger.

Failing to arrive at any satisfactory solution, the constable got

in touch with headquarters, and was instructed to enter the house. He did this through a downstairs window, and on entering the sitting-room he found a dead man lying on the couch. To his surprise it was not old Mr Tollinger, but a much younger man, and a bullet wound in his chest told its own story.

The constable at once got into communication with headquarters, and some police officers and a police surgeon were soon on the spot. In view of the extraordinary circumstances—the fact that Mr Tollinger was missing and that the dead man had nothing on his person to establish his identity—Scotland Yard was called in, and within an hour McLean and Sergeant Brook were at the house, which was situated about fifteen miles south of London, in a district which still contained some open spaces.

McLean was assured that no single thing had been touched, except the corpse, which the doctor had examined. The latter gave it as his opinion that the man had been dead five or six days, and that the wound he had received must have been instantly fatal. After McLean had examined the victim and taken everything from the pockets of the clothing, he was removed.

"Can I open the windows now?" asked Brook, who found the atmosphere insufferable.

"Yes—as many as you like."

"Funny business," said Brook, as he let in the fresh, cold air. "Looks as if he was shot while sitting on the couch, for there isn't a sign of blood anywhere else."

McLean nodded and examined a number of things for fingerprints. Being disappointed in this, he then gave his attention to the floor, and, with Brook's help, finally found two cartridge-cases.

"One shot must have missed," he said. "See if you can find where it went."

Brook searched the room diligently, while McLean went over the rest of the house with a view to seeing if there were any sign of burglary. The front bedroom appeared to be the only one that had been used recently. The bed was rather roughly made, and some garments were lying about, but everywhere else things were tidy, as they were downstairs.

Attached to the kitchen was a scullery, in which was a large modern gas-stove. The place smelt of gas, and McLean found that one tap of the stove was turned on. It was a small burner, and on it was a large kettle—empty. An examination of the gas-meter showed it was a shilling-in-the-slot apparatus, and the last shilling's worth had undoubtedly been used up.

"That gas jet was turned on when the murder was committed," he said. "It was left on afterwards and boiled away all the water in the kettle. Have a look at those gas burners."

Brook did this, and reported that they were all turned off. He

then went into the hall, and found that all the taps there were in the "off" position

"Proves nothing," said McLean "For the murderer might have turned off all the lights when he left the house—except the gas-stove, which he overlooked "

"Can't find any sign of that bullet," said Brook

"H'm!" said McLean in his non-committal way

II

THERE were a number of photographs in the house showing Mr Tollinger The latest, which was dated two years back, presented a man of about sixty years of age, with a small moustache and beard, and rather hunched shoulders

McLean had been informed that Tollinger had rented the house two years previously and that he was a retired tea planter from Ceylon He had lived entirely by himself, with the exception of a maidservant, who had been with him ever since he took the house

"We must find the servant," said McLean "Also, if possible, the piece of paper which the milkboy said he found outside the kitchen door five days ago He left it there, but it has doubtless been blown about Have a look for that "

Brook spent over an hour on this quest, but finally he succeeded, and brought in a strip of paper, on which was written "No milk until further notice "

"Good!" said McLean "Here's a slate from the kitchen on which some one—the maid presumably—wrote down certain household commodities The writing is quite different Now, did Tollinger himself write that? I've an old book of cheque counterfoils here That may clear up the matter "

A comparison of the writing on the counterfoils with that on the slip of paper showed there was no similarity at all

"Well, then, who wrote it?" asked Brook "No, don't tell me, sir," he added a little shamefacedly

"Thank you, Brook Yes, it was the murderer of the unknown man He had the sense to realise that certain tradesmen would call regularly The milkman, for example, and the newsboy He wrote the note to settle any questions in the milkman's mind "

"And overlooked the newsboy?"

"Not at all Here is the morning newspaper for the past five mornings They were slipped through the large letter-box in the front door There are also a few letters—all bills That rather looks as if the clever person who wrote the note knew quite well that the newspapers were usually slipped through the letter-box "

"You mean it was some one who knew Tollinger fairly well?"

"Yes"

"But, admitting that—where is Tollinger?"

"Dead"

"But why——?"

"Yes, why does the murderer take Tollinger away and leave the other man here? Possibly to make it appear that Tollinger is the murderer. The local police are already inclined to believe that. But there are too many arguments against it. The two shots that were fired—the message that was left for the milkman—the fact that Tollinger left the Siamese cat behind. Fortunately, the note and the date of the first newspaper enable us to fix the day of the crime. It was Monday, January the 28th."

"Yes, that seems clear," agreed Brook.

McLean was now endeavouring to find where the paper had come from on which the message was written. It was rather thin, and ruled with faint blue lines, and was not a complete sheet, but torn as if from a book, very irregularly at the side.

"Here's a writing block," said Brook. "It was in the drawer under the dresser."

McLean shook his head.

"Nothing like," he said. "Wait a moment—let me look at that."

He took the almost finished cheap writing block to the window and found something of very great importance. The last sheet which had been used had apparently been written with a hard pencil, and some of the impressions had come through. He read what he could make of them.

*" fed up with him told me that did it I let
him have . not going to bother for a bit first train
Fore Street, Hastings, until*

"Edith"

"That's going to expedite matters a lot," said McLean. "The postman will probably be able to tell us what her full name is. You'd better get on to that while I have another look round here."

The postman, when found, remembered the maidservant quite well, although he had no idea where she hailed from. Her name was Edith Tuckwell, and he described her as a cheeky kind of girl of about twenty years of age. The postman's feeling was that Tollinger was getting on her nerves, for she had once admitted that he was a "holy terror," and that if he "thought she was a bloomin' slave he'd find himself mistaken."

"We'd better get down to Hastings," said McLean. "The girl ought to be able to tell us something."

They went down to the coast by road and made inquiries in Fore

Street A considerable time was wasted, because the street in question was given up to boarding-houses of the cheaper kind, and no one knew any young lady of the name of Tuckwell But finally McLean was directed to a Mrs Rogers, whose sister, recently came to stay with her Mrs Rogers kept a small boarding-house called Spray House, although it was about a mile and a half from any spray On inquiring there he learned that she was the married sister of Edith Tuckwell, and that Edith was staying with her At that moment Edith was out shopping, but she returned some time later, and gasped when she was told that two police officers were waiting to see her Very timidly she came to McLean and gave her name

"You were in service with Mr Tollinger?" asked McLean

"Yes, sir—for two years "

"When did you leave him?"

"Last Monday morning "

"That would be the twenty-eighth?"

"Yes "

"Why did you leave him?"

"I quarrelled with him He had a bad temper, and I stuck it for over two years On the Sunday I broke a vegetable dish, and he raved at me, and called me names I up and told him what I thought of him, and he said I could take a month's notice I said I wasn't taking any month's notice—that I could get a job anywhere, servants being as rare as gold I said I'd clear out next morning, and he could do what he liked about it He said he would be glad to see the back of me "

"And you went?"

"Yes My sister, who lives here, had told me I could always spend a week or so with her in the off season, so I sent her a telegram telling her I was coming down "

"You wrote to some one else?"

"Yes—on the Sunday—after the bust-up A friend of mine who's in service in London I told her all about the quarrel "

"At what time did you leave the house?"

"Just after ten o'clock in the morning Mr Tollinger told me not to be a fool, but I'd had enough "

"Was he expecting any visitors that day?"

"He never said he was "

"Did you tell any one that you were leaving him on the Monday morning?"

"No "

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes Why, I never knew myself until the Sunday morning, when we had the quarrel—Mr Tollinger and me "

McLean was a little puzzled by this, because, according to his theory, the person who had murdered Tollinger must have known

that there was no one in the house but the old man. The alternative was a sheer coincidence.

"Well," he said finally, "I want you to come and attempt to identify a man."

"What man?"

"I don't know—but it is possible you may."

When she learned from Brook that the man in question was dead, she didn't want to accompany them.

"This is an important matter," said McLean. "Get your coat on—quickly!"

When she was ultimately confronted with the ghastly spectacle of the man who had been dead for five days, she fainted, but on being brought round she stated that she had seen the man before, but couldn't think where.

"Was it in Mr. Tollinger's house?" asked McLean.

"I can't remember," she wailed.

"Try. Where else could you have seen him?"

"It may have been in the house, but I'm not sure. Yes, I think it was—a long time ago. I think—yes, it was one evening. He called in a car, and Mr. Tollinger said he would see him. He stayed about half an hour."

"Can you remember what name he gave you?"

"No. It's too long ago. That's all I know—he came to the house. Can I go now, please?"

III

FOR some days McLean was in a dilemma. The clothing of the dead man had been carefully examined for laundry marks and so forth, and a full description of him was circulated and published. Then came Edith Tuckwell with a revived memory.

"I've just remembered," she said. "While that man was in the house he used the telephone. The instrument is in the hall, by the grandfather clock. He pencilled a number on the wall. I know because I tried to get it off, and couldn't. I thought it was a rotten thing to do in some one else's house. It's just by the side of the telephone in indelible pencil."

McLean paid another visit to the house, and found the telephone number exactly as described. It was very faint, but he managed to read it. Some time later he was given the address of the person who worked that number.

"John Lightley," he said. "Crandon Street, W.C."

Before he could pay John Lightley a visit he heard that the dead man had been identified by a lady who said she was his sister. McLean saw the sister at the first opportunity.

"You have identified your brother—Harry Tangye?"

"Yes"

"You have no doubt about it?"

"None at all"

"When did you last see him alive?"

"It was about six months ago He came to visit me and my husband"

"What was his occupation?"

She didn't know She and her brother had seen very little of each other during the past ten years He had been abroad—to Paris, Berlin, and other big capitals, but she had never questioned him about his business

"Do you know whether he was friendly with a man named Tollinger?"

"No I have never heard that name before"

"Have you ever heard the name—John Lightley?"

"Lightley? Yes, I have"

"In what connection?"

"About two years ago my brother met me by accident in a London street He had a man with him—very dark and good-looking He said his name was John Lightley"

"Can you be sure of that?"

"Quite sure, because I was very impressed by him"

"Do you know anything about Lightley?"

"Yes," she admitted, looking embarrassed "I saw him again—unknown to my brother—and we went out together once or twice My brother got to know of it, and was very angry He said I was a fool to 'play about' with Lightley as I was doing"

"I told him I wasn't 'playing about,' but that I liked Lightley He laughed and said I was a silly little fool, and that Lightley was a dangerous man I didn't know what he meant by that, but I think he must have spoken to Lightley, for I never saw him again, and for over a year I never spoke to my brother"

"You sound as if you had seen a great deal more of him than you led me to believe just now"

"Oh no, not more than six times in the last ten years, and most of those occasions were during the past two years"

"Do you know where Lightley lives?"

"No—not now"

McLean let her go, and then decided to see Mr John Lightley as quickly as possible After waiting for over an hour he saw Lightley enter his flat.

"We'll go in now," he said to Sergeant Brook

"Are you Mr John Lightley?" asked McLean

"Yes"

"I am a police officer, and want to ask you a few questions"

"Come right in," said Lightley cheerily

He showed them into a cosy sitting-room, and threw off his coat as he remarked on the cold, bright weather. McLean could well understand Miss Tangye's reference to his looks, for he was as handsome as a Greek statue, but carried a cunning expression in his dark eyes.

"Do you know a Mr Tollinger?" asked McLean.

"Tollinger—Tollinger? You don't mean Toler?"

"I mean Tollinger."

"No. That's a new one on me."

"Do you know a Mr Harry Tangye?"

He hesitated, and McLean thought he was remembering Tangye's sister, and realised the need for caution.

"Yes, I do," he said.

"When did you last see him?"

"Let me see—it would be Tuesday—no, last Monday week. He came here—about ten o'clock in the morning, to ask me if I cared to go to the coast with him. I said I couldn't spare the time. He had a drink, and then got into his car and drove away."

"You haven't seen him since?"

"No."

"Had you business connections with him?"

"Oh no. I think he was independent."

"And you?"

"I'm an engineer—out of a job at the moment, but I hope to go to South Africa soon."

"I have a search warrant," said McLean.

"What on earth for?"

McLean made no reply, but started to ransack the flat. He found nothing that would implicate Lightley. There was no sign of a fire-arm, and no correspondence. It looked as if Lightley had made a beautiful clear-up, if indeed he had anything to do with the murder—or murders.

"Satisfied, inspector?" asked Lightley, when McLean came in from the bedroom with empty hands.

"So far," said McLean. "But I must make a personal search."

Lightley seemed not quite so pleased, and this was due to the presence of a very large packet of bank-notes in his inside pocket. They represented nearly five hundred pounds in all, and were quite good ones.

"Where did you get these?" asked McLean.

"Dog racing. I had some luck."

"So I should imagine."

In the inside pocket of the overcoat which he had taken off McLean found a priceless clue. It was a large note-book, with thin paper, on which was blue ruling. The entries in it were not of great

interest, as they dealt with racing form, but on turning back a few pages McLean found that a page had been torn out clumsily, leaving a small portion still in the book

"Got it!" he said

He then produced the note which had been left at Tollinger's house for the milk-boy, and the torn edge of it fitted exactly into the piece that was still left in the book. In addition, the handwriting tallied

"I arrest you for the murder of Harry Tangye," he said, and Brook was quick with the handcuffs

Two days later Tollinger's body was found strapped to the driving wheel of a two-seater car and sunk in a deep pond not far from Tollinger's house. There was a bullet wound in the chest, as with Tangye, and the pistol which had fired the shot was in the car. There was also a partly-used cheque-book in Tollinger's pocket, and on the last counterfoil was the sum of £500 made out to "Self". The bank-notes found on Lightley were traced to the bank which had cashed Mr. Tollinger's cheque.

"A pretty clear case," said McLean. "I don't think he'll stand much chance."

He was hopeful that in the end Lightley would confess, but he refused to do so, even after he knew he would hang.

"And what's the real solution?" asked Brook.

"Some dishonest game, in which Tollinger took a part. Those two men went there to collect money—£500. Tollinger had obviously drawn it to pay out to them. They may have quarrelled, but I think it's more likely that while they were there Lightley got to know that the maidservant had left suddenly, and realised what a fine chance it was to take all the plunder."

"He then struck the idea of leaving the note, and of taking Tollinger away in Tangye's car and sinking it in that old quarry pond. Had we been longer in finding Tangye's body, Lightley might have gone to South Africa, but our little friend the Siamese cat—whom he overlooked—prevented that. I think I shall try to buy that cat," he added reflectively.

Dr. Louis Raphael

“ SILVER-MASK ”

By

AUGUSTUS MUIR

“ **T**HE police haven’t laid their hands on Silver-mask yet, sir,” I said to Dr. Louis Raphael one Saturday evening in November. “ And I’m beginning to think they never will. Perhaps he’s retired from business to live on his ill-gotten gains ”

I pointed to a headline in the evening newspaper I had bought on my way home from the Pathological Institute in Headley Street, where I had spent the afternoon making notes for a chapter in the book on which Raphael was engaged.

“ Curious you should mention this mysterious gentleman the newspapers call Silver-mask,” said Raphael, pouring himself out another glass of sherry and sipping the wine appreciatively. “ As it happens, I’ve been thinking about him this evening. He’s certainly clever ”

“ Clever isn’t the word for it, sir,” I exclaimed. “ To walk into a fashionable restaurant and hold it up at a pistol’s point—it takes some nerve. And to pull the same thing off three times within a month—that needs genius ”

I honestly don’t think I was exaggerating when I called it genius. The only disguise the unknown raider had ever used was a mask of silver-coloured silk. But it had been so effective that not a soul seemed to have the slightest inkling of the man’s identity, although it was possible that the police knew a little more than the newspaper reporters imagined. Since I had become the personal secretary of Dr. Louis Raphael, my slight contacts with the Criminal Investigation Department had taught me this: the police usually know just a little more than they are prepared to admit.

“ I’ve been trying to put two and two together and make four,” said Raphael thoughtfully, setting down his sherry on the table and stuffing his hands into the pockets of his dressing-gown. “ It sounds a simple sum, when you know that four is probably the answer. But it isn’t quite so easy as that ” He changed the subject abruptly. “ Do you remember the little luncheon-party we gave here two days ago? ”

“ I’m not likely to forget it, sir! ” I said meaningly, and Raphael accepted my gentle reproof with a smile. During the two months I

had been in his employment, he had been steadily hammering day and night at his book, in all this time he had met nobody except the two or three people with whom his work brought him into contact, and I had been astonished when he suddenly kicked over the traces and gave a luncheon-party to some of his friends

Raphael looked at me quizzically “I’m no thought reader, Meredith, but I think I know one of the reasons why you enjoyed that luncheon Was it the presence of the beautiful *Señorita Cordova*? Well, I can’t blame you She’s a particularly charming girl It was pleasant of Lady Trevayne to bring her along ”

I couldn’t deny that I had found the Spanish girl charming, and most delightfully unspoiled in spite of her success On the Continent, of course, she had made quite a reputation as a dancer during recent months, and the Marquise Hotel people had brought her over to London to star in their cabaret The hit she had made in town had been tremendous, and since she was due for a big film in Hollywood this was her last week Indeed, on that particular Saturday night she was to have given her final performance at the Marquise Hotel

“I was going to suggest to you, Meredith,” said Raphael, “that you have this evening off, and take some nice girl to see Cordova dance to-night ”

“It would be rather jolly,” I confessed, inwardly regretting that Dr Raphael hadn’t suggested it a bit earlier The problem of finding some nice girl to take at such short notice was scarcely an easy one to solve

“But you can dismiss the notion,” went on Raphael, “because the show to-night at the Marquise is off—at least, so far as Cordova is concerned ”

“Cordova isn’t to dance!” I exclaimed “But it’s a gala night—her last appearance in London this winter ”

“They’ll have to find an understudy,” said Raphael briefly “*Señorita Cordova* won’t dance to-night, for the simple reason that miracles don’t happen ”

My employer looked at me steadily for a few moments

“Come upstairs and I’ll show you, Meredith,” he said, and made a gesture for me to follow him He led me upstairs to the big bedroom above the library On a low table at the head of the bed there was a shaded light, and sitting beside it was the motionless figure of a nurse in uniform She rose as we entered,

And then my mouth suddenly went dry Stretched out on the bed, I could see the slim outline of a girl’s body, and the beautiful white face on the pillow was that of Cordova The pallid lips were slightly parted, and the breath was fluttering from them in little soft gasps

“There’s no change, doctor,” said the nurse in a quiet voice

"No change?" Raphael sat down by the bedside. A pale arm lay rigid on the sheet, and he put his finger on the wrist.

Presently, he rose and gave some instructions to the nurse, an elderly woman with a rather hard face and confident manner. I heard him say something about another injection of strychnine in a few hours' time.

"If there's any change, let me know at once," he added, and led the way back to the library.

I suppose I must have looked a bit startled at what I had seen. Half a dozen questions were on the tip of my tongue. How in heaven's name did Cordova come to be here? Why was it that a few hours before her gala performance she was lying unconscious? What the devil had happened, and where did Dr. Louis Raphael come into the picture? But I stemmed back the questions, because I could see that he wasn't being silent merely for his own amusement. In fact, it was plain that he was considerably worried.

"Captain Wilde should be back in a few minutes," he said. "Perhaps he'll have some further information."

Captain Wilde—I seemed to remember the name. And then it flashed back to me. A man called Stephen Wilde had come with Lady Trevayne and Cordova to the luncheon-party two days before. They had seemed to be close friends, Cordova and he, and indeed the whisper was going round that they were soon to become engaged—but this rumour might have started from the fact that they had been seen a lot together since her arrival in London. When I'd met him on Thursday he had struck me as a very decent fellow—and he was certainly a lucky one!

"It was Captain Wilde who rushed her along here in his car this evening," explained Raphael. "She's been living in a little service flat off Piccadilly, and when he called to see her between five and six o'clock he found her on the point of collapse. She was all alone in the flat—her maid was out. Apparently he failed to get hold of his own doctor on the phone—and since Wilde had been here two days ago, he said I was the only other medical man he could think of at the moment. Anyhow, he rang me up, and hurried her along in his car—he knew there mightn't be a moment to lose. The girl was certainly in a pretty bad state, and was quite unconscious when she arrived."

"Have you found out what's wrong with her?" I asked. "I mean she isn't likely to fade right out."

"It isn't as bad as that. With luck, we'll pull her round. Yes, I know what's wrong with her all right." Raphael lit one of his fat Egyptian cigarettes and spun the match into the fireplace. "Dope!"

"Good lord. You don't mean—she's in the habit of using "

"Nothing like that." Raphael shook his head emphatically. "But

dope it certainly is. She either took it herself deliberately—or, more likely, it was given to her. By a bit of luck, I managed to spot the stuff. It was erythroxine—a new American drug. In liquid form, it looks and tastes rather like port wine. But there’s this about it—it leaves a purple stain on the skin. It was a tiny stain on one corner of her lip that put me on to it. When I noticed the faintest smell of freesia blossom, I was as sure as one can be in the circumstances. Possibly she was given the drug in a glass of port.”

“But who would have done it?” I cried.

Raphael shrugged his shoulders. “Captain Wilde says he passed a man on the stairs as he was going up to her flat.”

“Why on earth should anybody——” I began.

“I’m as much at sea as you are,” interrupted Raphael. “If I knew something definite about the fellow Wilde saw on the stairs, I might be able to answer your question. Anyhow, as soon as I saw what the matter was, I took the usual precaution—which I needn’t describe—and then injected strychnine. When she comes round, she’ll perhaps tell us more about it. And perhaps she won’t! For all I know, she may have tried to take her own life. But whatever’s behind it, it’s a pretty ghastly business for the poor girl.”

Hullo, that sounds like Wilde. He said he was going back to her flat to find out what he could about the mysterious gentleman on the stairs.”

A car had stopped outside the house, and sure enough it was Captain Wilde. He was a healthy-looking man of about forty-five, and it was plain from the expression of his pleasant darkish-blue eyes that he had got a bad shake.

“God, this is a horrible business, doctor!” he began, almost echoing the words Raphael had just spoken. “How is she now?”

“Much the same,” replied the other. “Certainly no worse, which at least is satisfactory. Found out anything more?”

“No, I’m completely beaten. Her personal maid was out on an errand between five and six, and I can’t hear anything about that fellow I saw coming down from her door. There’s no lift to her flat, and the people below can tell me nothing. The trouble is, I don’t suppose I could spot him even if I saw him again, I only gave him a passing glance.” He broke off and drew in a long breath. “Thank heaven she isn’t worse! I rang up the Marquise Hotel people and told them she was ill and couldn’t appear to-night. I thought it better not to go into details.”

“Quite right,” nodded Raphael. “But if there’s been foul play, the police will have to be told.”

“I know! That’s the dreadful thing. If there’s going to be a lot of vile publicity for Cordova in the newspapers, it won’t do the poor girl any good. Scandal never does. How soon do you think she’s likely to pull round?”

"It may be a good many hours yet," said Raphael "But we're running some risk in not informing the police Supposing the worst happened—what if she *doesn't* pull round?"

Captain Wilde's lips trembled, and he took a quick step forward, his fingers clenched "Then she's worse than you say . . ."

Raphael stood with half-closed eyes for some moments "No, she isn't She's pretty low, but I think she'll be able to tell us the whole story by morning—if she chooses to!"

Wilde drew his uneasy fingers across his forehead "God, I wish we knew what's behind all this I tell you frankly, doctor, I'm—I'm scared"

The man certainly looked it, and I felt sorry for him he cut a rather pathetic figure

Raphael paced slowly across the room, and came as slowly back "Do you know what crossed my mind when you mentioned that man coming down the stairs from her flat? I wondered if the mysterious gentleman they called Silver-mask had anything to do with this . . . It's rather a wild guess, I admit—and perhaps I'm wrong." He shrugged his shoulders, and turned towards the cabinet in the corner of the room "Let me mix you a drink before you go—" But there was an unexpected interruption

The door was suddenly opened, and on the threshold stood a stranger We were all rather taken back He seemed to have pushed past Raphael's old manservant, whose startled face I saw for a moment in the hall as the newcomer closed the door behind him

"Forgive me," he said, speaking in a slow voice, with the faintest trace of a foreign accent "Dr Raphael?"

Raphael nodded "I'm busy just now," he said curtly

"I am sorry, I have come on an important matter" His long thin fingers were smoothing the brim of his soft felt hat He was a man of perhaps about fifty, tall and lean, with well-cut clothes, and a pair of brilliant dark eyes looked out from a deeply lined and almost colourless face But for these eyes of his, you would have said it was a face entirely without expression

"I've already said I'm busy," returned Raphael, and the man bowed

"I apologise I have no right to intrude upon you, but you have a friend of mine here—Señorita Cordova Is it so?"

"Who told you she was here?" demanded Raphael tersely

"I have just come from her flat," replied the stranger in his slow voice "Her maid said she was ill I am a friend of hers, I have a right to know"

There was a sudden movement at my side, and Captain Wilde stepped forward His eyes were fixed on the stranger's face "You say you've just come from her flat," he said "Were you there by any chance between five and six o'clock?"

“Between five and six,” repeated the man deliberately, and moistened his lips “Between five and six” He glanced at Raphael, then at me, and his dark eyes went back to Wilde “No, I was not there at that hour, I have just returned to London”

If the man was lying, he was doing it devilishly well I could say that for him There was silence in the room for a few moments, and then Raphael strolled across to him

“I’m sorry,” he said offhandedly, “I don’t know who you are You may be a friend of Miss Cordova’s, but she’s in my care just now I’m afraid you can’t see her”

“May I not be permitted——” began the stranger, and I could see his white fingers tightening

“It’s out of the question”

Raphael’s tone was decisive, and the stranger accepted the verdict with a slight inclination of his head

“If you care to leave your name and address . . .” Raphael suggested as he opened the door

“It is of little consequence, I will telephone later” With another slight bow, the stranger turned and walked slowly out

“Queer devil,” muttered Wilde, when Dr Raphael returned to the room “What do you make of him?”

“We may hear more of him yet,” replied Raphael with a puzzled frown “I don’t see that we can do anything further meantime I’ll ring you up, Captain Wilde, as soon as there’s any change in Cordova’s condition—a change which I hope will be for the better You’re staying at the Marquise Hotel, I believe?”

Wilde nodded “That’s where I met her” And then he hesitated, and made a little shy gesture that was almost boyish “We’re comparatively new friends, Cordova and I—but, well, I don’t mind admitting that she—means a lot to me”

“I quite understand,” said Raphael gently

My employer was silent at dinner that evening, and went upstairs immediately afterwards I transcribed my notes in the library until a fairly late hour, wondering when Raphael would appear for his usual spell of night-work, but when he did come down he had a surprise for me

“We’re going to the Marquise Hotel, Meredith,” he said, “I have an idea that the cabaret to-night may be rather interesting”

Wondering what was at the back of his mind, I got out the car, and a little more than ten minutes later I was backing the big Centuria into a vacant space in the car-park beside the hotel We walked round to the front entrance together, and Raphael went straight to the reception desk and asked for Captain Wilde

“Are you Dr Raphael, sir?” said the clerk “Captain Wilde got your phone message—I’ll send for him at once”

A couple of minutes later, Wilde hurried across the hall "Tell me, how is she, doctor?" he asked, his face lined with anxiety "Don't say she's worse . . ."

"Still under the weather," said Raphael, "but her pulse is a little better She ought to be out of the wood by morning"

"Thank heaven for that! I was giving a little party to-night—in honour of Cordova's last appearance, but I'm afraid it's going to be rather a dismal affair for me Nina Paglani is dancing in her place" He hesitated "I've been thinking over what you said, doctor—I mean, about the criminal they call Silver-mask You wondered if he had a finger in this Well, supposing he had some reason—some good reason, for preventing Cordova from dancing to-night I can't see any motive in it, I'll admit, but somehow I can't get the idea out of my head" And then he gave a start and pointed down the corridor, where people were moving in small groups to the dance-room in which the cabaret show was to be held "Did you see that? It looked mighty like the man who called at your house this evening—the fellow who wouldn't leave his name"

Raphael's dark eyes half-closed "So he's here! Captain Wilde, we made a mistake this evening—we should have told the police the whole story I said we were taking a risk—yes, I know, we did it for Cordova's sake—but if anything happens here to-night, it means trouble for me afterwards" He bit his lip, and his voice dropped "I'm going to remain here, Captain Wilde If anything goes wrong, can I count on your help? With Meredith, that makes three of us If Silver-mask intends to make a move here to-night, I think I can queer his pitch"

"You can count on me," said Captain Wilde, "but I hope there's no trouble in the wind—for Cordova's sake as well as our own"

He left us to join his guests, who were arriving, and I followed Raphael through the dancing-room Half a dozen couples were already on the floor, the band was playing the latest tunes, and a throaty tenor chimed in with dismal songs about unrequited love Soon the place was filled up, until the small floor was packed with the usual smart crowd that had come to give Cordova a final ovation Every one knew by this time that Nina Paglani was dancing instead of her, and they seemed determined to make the best of it But all the time there was a picture that I couldn't get out of my head—the grim picture of Cordova lying white and motionless, with a uniformed nurse watching at the bedside Raphael ordered some food, and champagne was put on the table

The cabaret began in the customary way Half a dozen chorus-girls danced, and a rubicund man at the piano sang a witty song or two, with the usual innuendo at the end of each verse During the interval, I caught Captain Wilde's eye, and he nodded dismally

Nor did Raphael himself help to enliven matters. He sat gently twirling his glass by the stem and watching the tiny bubbles sparkling on the surface of his champagne, until at last the lights were lowered for Cordova's turn—or rather Nina Paglani's.

The luminous ray of a spot-light shone down from a little alcove above a flight of narrow steps, and a circle of light quivered upon the floor. The band struck up a slow rhythmic waltz, and the luminous circle went wavering across towards the golden curtains through which the dancer was about to emerge. One after another, the dimmed lights around the room went right out, leaving the place in complete darkness except for the pool of brightness in front of the curtains. There was a pause. And then something seemed to go wrong.

From the alcove, where an operator controlled the lights in the room, there was the sound of a sudden choking gasp. The spot-light went out. For about another five seconds or so, the band played on, and then the music tailed away into silence—a silence that was deathly. And from the middle of the floor, a low voice began to speak in the darkness.

I heard Raphael stem back his breath, and I sat gripping the edge of the table. A woman gave a low cry of terror, and there was silence again. Suddenly the white beam of an electric torch cut through the darkness, and went flickering swiftly around the room. Beside it I could see the glint of the squat barrel of an automatic pistol. In a sharp whisper, the man in the centre of the floor ordered every one to sit perfectly still. Silver-mask was here!

And one thing was evident. He had no intention of wasting time. A diamond necklace was removed from a woman at a table on the edge of the floor. I could see her terrified eyes in the beam of the torch. An emerald bracelet was taken from her neighbour. And then that long white ray came sweeping round to a table a yard or two away from us. Presently a white hand was being stretched out towards a string of pearls on a woman's neck.

It was a hand with long tapering fingers; it might almost have been a woman's hand, and yet somehow it reminded me of the talons of a hawk.

At my side I heard Raphael rise slowly to his feet. Any moment now, I knew he was ready to spring forward, and I braced myself to follow him. Then I heard him give a curious little exclamation, and he resumed his seat.

The beam of the electric torch was switched off. There was a swift movement of feet, and I heard the sudden sound of a scuffle in the middle of the floor. Somebody had tackled the raider in the darkness.

This time Raphael did not hesitate. “Now for it, Meredith!” I heard him say as he crushed forward between the tables that

separated us from the dancing-floor. But before we could extricate ourselves, a man's voice rang out, and there was a dull sound of somebody going down in a heap. A few seconds later, as Raphael and I rushed forward, the lights in the room were switched on.

The figure of a man was scrambling up from the floor. His hair was ruffled, and his white tie had been torn from his neck. For a moment he seemed slightly dazed, and then he recovered himself. "I nearly had the devil!" he gasped out. "Which way did he go?"

It was Captain Wilde who spoke. His eyes were blazing with fury—he had more courage than I'd given him credit for! "If you'd come a second earlier," he muttered to Raphael, "we'd have held the swine."

I didn't catch what Raphael replied, for there was a sudden uproar of voices around us, and half a dozen people surged in panic towards the entrance. But the grim fact remained. Silver-mask had pulled off yet another raid with complete success.

Captain Wilde drove back with us to Raphael's house on the Embankment, and we were a pretty dismal trio as we descended from the car.

Raphael flung open the library door. "Sit down," he said, "I will be with you in a few moments." And then he stopped and stared into the room.

Standing in front of the electric-fire was the man who had called earlier in the evening and had refused to leave his name. His overcoat was open, and I noticed that he wore evening clothes.

"You see, I have come back," he said in his slow dispassionate voice. "I would like to see Señorita Cordova before I go. I leave London to-night."

Raphael went forward into the room, and Wilde and I followed. "So you're going on a journey, eh?" said Raphael. "A long journey?"

"I may be away for some time," returned the man, "I would like to see Cordova now."

"What if you won't be able to see her until to-morrow? Can you remain in London until then?"

"I must go to-night," replied the man uneasily.

"By the way," said Raphael, "were you at the Marquise Hotel an hour ago? My friend here thinks he saw you. That correct, Captain Wilde?"

"I could almost swear to it," said the other.

The stranger's eyes were half-closed. "What of that?" he asked slowly.

"What of that?" Raphael laughed. "Perhaps you'll be interested in what I have to tell you. Cordova was brought here this

evening in a drugged condition ” He paused “ You don’t seem surprised?”

“ Nothing surprises me,” said the man “ Please proceed ”

“ I intend to,” nodded Raphael “ At the Marquise Hotel to-night a certain gentleman they call Silver-mask—perhaps you’ve heard the name—pulled off another of his raids That makes the fourth in the last month or so ”

The man met Raphael’s eyes unflinchingly “ What has this to do with my friend Cordova?”

Raphael took a step nearer to him “ Possibly it has a lot to do with Señorita Cordova! Let me suggest to you a reason why she was drugged this evening Supposing she had found out by chance that Silver-mask was one of her personal acquaintances—supposing she had learned that it was his definite intention to raid the Marquise Hotel An admirable opportunity for him, mark you, it was a gala performance Shall we proceed? Very well Supposing he tries to terrify her into silence, but she threatens him with exposure Can you picture the scene?”

“ Well?” said the man steadily

“ It is Cordova’s custom to have a glass of port and a small biscuit every evening between five and six The man had come prepared—he decides to silence Cordova for the time being He dopes her wine with erythroxine, a drug she would not detect You see, he is determined to pull off his final *coup* at the Marquise—and then quietly disappear But presently he fears he has given her an overdose—he is afraid he may one day be charged with murder And in his terror he does something that gives him away You follow me?”

“ I follow,” said the man

“ And supposing he is here now, in this room, in order to learn how soon Cordova may recover consciousness to find how many hours of safety he has left to get out of the country Do I make myself quite plain?” He touched a bell near the fireplace, and waited until the door opened

“ We are ready, nurse,” he said, and then turned again to the stranger who stood on the other side of the hearth

“ I think I can guess what you are going to ask,” went on Raphael “ How do I know it was Silver-mask who gave the drug to Señorita Cordova? Let me tell you that erythroxine leaves a curious purple stain if it touches the human skin—a stain very difficult to remove To-night, when the hand of Silver-mask was stretched out to take a certain pearl necklace, a few yards away from me, I happened to notice something There was a purple stain on one of his fingers A trifling detail? Assuredly! But I happened to have seen that same stain on a man’s hand early in the evening—yes, in this very room!” He broke off as the door opened

When I turned, I could hardly believe my eyes

On the threshold, leaning on the nurse's arm, stood Cordova herself!

Raphael smiled "I'm glad to say the Señorita recovered consciousness several hours ago—in fact, before we left for the Marquise Hotel May I be pardoned for keeping the fact to myself—or rather for communicating it only to the police? I have called in the Señorita to identify our man"

Raphael glanced towards her inquiringly

"Yes," she said in a low voice

"Then take your prisoner, Sergeant!"

With a quick step forward, the stranger flung himself upon Captain Wilde There was a struggle, a choking gasp, and a pair of handcuffs clicked upon Wilde's wrists A moment later there were placed carefully upon the table a diamond necklace, a long string of pearls, an emerald bracelet, an automatic pistol and finally a mask of thin silver-coloured silk

"So you thought, if you brought Cordova here you would divert suspicion from yourself, Captain Wilde!" Raphael looked the other man in the eye "It was a bold card to play, and it might have succeeded—but for one thing"

Wilde's face was ashen as Raphael pointed to the manacled hands On one of the fingers there was a small purple stain

Dr Louis Raphael laughed quietly

"If I may say so, Sergeant, you played your part well—yes, right from the beginning, before you knew for certain that this was your man When you're taking him to the police station, do please impress upon him that erythroxine is a dangerous drug—at least for a crook to handle But let's have a drink all round before you go Let us drink to the health of a charming little lady who discovered, to her cost, that one of her most fervent admirers was a desperate scoundrel Let us drink to—Cordova!"

Roger Sheringham

WHITE BUTTERFLY

By

ANTHONY BERKELEY

ROGER SHERINGHAM frowned at the paper in his hand
"Well, Mr Sheringham?" asked his guest, in tones of resignation

"This is most disturbing, Moresby," said Roger. He had been amusing himself for the last half-hour by testing the word-reactions of Detective Chief-inspector Moresby. The results indubitably proved the chief-inspector to be an introvert, a potential murderer and a trafficker in illicit drugs.

"Most disturbing," he repeated, eyeing the burly form of his guest with a new interest. "Have some more beer."

"Well, thank you, Mr Sheringham. I don't mind if I do."

As he replenished the tankards Roger acquainted Moresby with the discoveries he had just made.

"Ah, well," said Moresby comfortably, "it's a wonderful science, this psychology, I expect. Why don't you apply it to this affair at Clearmouth?"

Roger pricked up his ears. "What affair at Clearmouth?"

"What, you haven't heard of it, Mr Sheringham?" grinned Moresby maliciously. "Well, there. But it hasn't got into the papers, so perhaps you wouldn't."

"Tell me," Roger demanded.

Moresby took a deep pull at his tankard, wiped his walrus moustache with some care, and told him.

The county authorities (said Moresby) had been perturbed by the rumours concerning the disappearance of a certain Mrs Warrington from her home in the small seaside town of Clearmouth. Mrs Warrington, a pretty and charming but somewhat volatile woman, had not been seen for about six weeks. Her husband, who was a man of some consequence in Clearmouth, being the little town's only solicitor, had confided to a couple of close friends, under the strictest promises of secrecy, that she had left him to go to her lover and that he had no expectation of ever seeing her again, nor indeed would he take her back should she try to return.

There had been a scene during the evening she left when Warrington had first discovered the intrigue. According to his account she had flung in his face the information that it had been in progress for two years, that she had never cared for him, and

had married him only for his position, which at the time of their marriage had certainly been a great deal better than hers

He had upbraided her, and she had retorted by taunting him with having been deceived so successfully and so long. Repeated questions failed to bring out the name of her lover, and Warrington could only gather that he was a married man, that the plans discussed by the two for over a year were now ready, that the man was going to get a divorce from his wife in order to marry Mrs Warrington as soon as her own divorce was through, and that evidence enabling Warrington to file his petition for this would shortly be offered him

Mrs Warrington appeared to feel no shame, and Warrington was thunderstruck by the revelation of her real character, hitherto quite unsuspected by him. That this scene, or something like it, had certainly taken place was confirmed by the servants, who had heard the raised and angry voices

In the end Warrington had given his wife a week in which to leave the house. She had thanked him ironically, and cut down the period to half an hour. Her lover was staying in the neighbourhood, she told him, and she would simply take a small case to hold her jewels and a few necessities and leave at once, the rest of her clothes could be sent on later, when she was able to furnish an address, or maybe she would never send for them at all as she wished to take into her new life nothing that would remind her of the distasteful old one

She had then flounced up to her bedroom, and shortly afterwards had left the house on foot. The servants did not hear her leave, for the time of departure, according to Mr Warrington, was after half-past eleven and by then they were in bed

Since then, Mr Warrington informed his close friends, he had not heard from her, nor expected to do so, and once the first shock had worn off, considered that he was well rid of her. As to the identity of her lover, he had not the least idea, and a search of her room and belongings since she went had revealed nothing

The close friends then went out and, overlooking their promises, spread the good news far and wide

So much for Mr Warrington's story. Subsequent gossip, on the other hand, was quite different

Boiled down, and with the toothsome details steamed out of it this amounted in substance to the conviction that Mr Warrington had killed his wife that evening, taken the body out to sea in his convenient little motor-launch and there buried it without benefit of clergy. The circumstantial story which he subsequently told so the gossips affirmed, had been carefully thought out and divulged to the close friends under pledges of secrecy because Mr Warrington knew that this was the surest way of broadcasting it without

embarrassment to himself, and he had chosen the friends in question with a canny eye to their fallibility in the matter of solemn pledges. So if Mr Warrington himself was harshly treated by the gossip, the friends, too, did not altogether escape.

"And the authorities believe there's something in the rumours?" Roger asked, when Moresby had finished.

"There's no evidence for or against the man's story, Mr Sheringham. Not a jot. But if he is lying—well, it wouldn't be the first case where the police were put on the track by local gossip, would it?"

"No. But usually there's a body to exhume, and that makes the real point of departure for the case. Here, I take it, there's nothing. What have the police done?"

"Oh, they've questioned Warrington, of course, and searched the house. But he sticks to his story, and, of course, he's up to every trick of law, and as for the house there was nothing incriminating at all. I happen to know about it because the Super down there's a friend of mine, and he consulted me unofficially. He told me that when Warrington was away they even probed the flower-beds with iron rods, and any other place in the garden that looked as if it had been disturbed lately, but they couldn't find a thing. No, it looks as if he'd got away with it all right."

"They really do think he killed his wife, then?"

"They're not satisfied that he didn't," corrected Moresby, with official caution.

Roger smiled. "And what do you want me to do about it, Moresby?"

"I wouldn't *want* you to do anything, Mr Sheringham. But it did occur to me, since they can't very well send for us just on the strength of a bit of local gossip, that if you did happen to be taking a bit of a holiday soon in the neighbourhood of Clearmouth, I could give you a note to the Super there and I wouldn't say that he mightn't mind having a bit of a chat with you."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" Roger laughed. "Very well, Moresby. I'm due for a bit of a holiday in any case. I'll go down to Clearmouth to-morrow. You can write that note here and now."

Rodger presented his note at the headquarters of the County Police two days later. Superintendent Fisher, a bulky, red-faced friendly man, made no bones about being pleased to see him.

"We're in a difficult position, you see, Mr Sheringham," he told Roger as they sat together in his office. "Between you and me there's a grave suspicion that the man's made away with his wife. But we've nothing to go on. Nothing at all. His story holds water, and unless we can find the body we can't do a thing. And since that's probably at the bottom of the sea a couple of miles out we don't stand much chance of finding it."

"You think he buried her at sea, then?"

"It'd be his best move, wouldn't it? We can't get any evidence about his launch being out that night, but if he killed her that's about what he did."

"I wonder," said Roger

The superintendent looked at him sharply "You don't agree?"

"Oh, I don't say that. In any case it's impossible to say what he might or might not do till I've had a look at him. I'll call on him this afternoon. I shall be a wealthy manufacturer of electric belts and I want to make my will. I'm staying at Clearmouth for a holiday, and I understand the bathing's dangerous. I'm consulting a strange solicitor because I don't want to let my own solicitor know of a change I'm making in the disposition of my fortune after death."

The superintendent laughed heartily "Very well, Mr Sheringham. And perhaps after you've made your will you'll come and tell what your impressions were."

"Certainly I will. And, of course, the first thing I've got to try to decide is whether the man seems capable of murder at all. Very few people are. If he isn't, he's probably telling the truth about that last evening with his wife. We mustn't after all lose sight of that possibility."

"Oh, of course, it's quite on the cards that the lady's alive and well with her gentleman-friend, and all our trouble's for nothing," agreed the superintendent. It was, however, clear from his tone that he considered the possibility a remote one.

Roger went out to catch his bus.

Clearmouth proved to be a charming little old-fashioned town. Lying a mile or two up an estuary, it had escaped the appalling fate which has overtaken most charming towns on the South Coast during the last couple of decades. It contained no banana-stalls, no charabancs, and scarcely any horrid little bungalows, but it did contain a quantity of scandalmongers.

The house in the cobble-paved main street in which Mr Warrington had his offices, was in keeping with the rest—a mellow little Queen Anne affair with the tint of a ripe peach. Its bay-windows and carved door-frames almost reconciled Roger to the half-hour's delay before he was admitted to the presence. Mr Warrington, he gathered in casual chat from the clerk in charge, was a very busy man. Then a rubicund face, almost exactly matching the ripe colour of the brick outside, was poked abruptly round one of the carved door-frames, a rich, fruity voice that harmonised excellently with the face inquired for Mr Merribrook, and a plump little hand waved a simultaneous welcome and invitation into the adjoining room. The interview had begun.

Sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, Roger studied his quarry. If

Mr Warrington, plump, red-faced and jolly, really was a murderer, he was as unlike the popular idea of one as he was unlike the popular idea of a solicitor. To Roger he appeared more like a modern edition of one of the Cheeryble brothers, with his fruity little chuckle that punctuated almost every other sentence, whether called for or not. Was it possible, Roger wondered as the interview progressed, that such a chuckle could get on a wife's nerves until she could bear it no longer and took to a lover as a kind of relief? Stranger things have happened in feminine psychology.

Mr. Warrington might look like a combination of a Cheeryble brother and a hunting squire, but he was a shrewd man. Roger realised that soon enough, to his own discomfort, for the solicitor's questions concerning his alleged electric-belt business were so searching, and, as time went on, even so artful, that Roger had difficulty in keeping the discussion on the topic of his mythical family. He began to regret his semi-humorous choice of so impossible a profession the more as he thought he detected an increasing twinkle in the other's blue eye.

The disposal of the electric-belt manufacturer's wealth went on. Legacies were made to imaginary aunts, nephews, nieces and even cousins, till Roger was hard put to it to invent their names, and still he could not make up his mind whether the man sitting on the opposite side of the table was a potential murderer or not.

He tried to imagine Mr Warrington in a rage.

Undoubtedly he might possess a violent temper. But was he not shrewd enough to control it? Or was he capable of carrying out a murder planned in advance? What were the secret springs under that hearty, squire-like exterior? For the life of him Roger could not decide. Was there even a haunted expression at the back of the man's blue eyes, a hint of tragedy, remorse, fear, anything you like? If there was, Roger could not discern it.

His imagination began to flag. He mumbled something about having forgotten his notes. Might he come in again to-morrow? Mr Warrington agreed that he might, and made a note of the appointment. His mission still unfulfilled, Roger rose to go, not too well pleased with himself. Hearty Mr Warrington, now heartier than ever, rose too, his eyes twinkling.

"Well till to-morrow, then, Mr Sheringham."

"Yes," nodded Roger, and then jumped. "Eh?"

"Oh, I recognised you at once. You know, you didn't carry that electric-belt business off very well," chuckled Mr Warrington. "Why electric-belts, after all? In fact, why this interview at all?"

Roger had succeeded in getting control of himself. He decided in a sudden inspiration to try shock-tactics.

"Because," he said deliberately, "I wanted to size you up, Mr Warrington, in view of all these rumours about you."

"I'm honoured" Mr. Warrington did not seem in the least put out. On the contrary, he appeared much amused. "You wanted to find out whether I'm a potential murderer, I suppose. Well, well, I knew the police were interested in this absurd gossip, after all, it's their duty to be so, but I didn't know I'd attracted the amateurs too. Dear me, if this kind of thing goes on I shall have to offer a large reward to Marian to make herself known. If I've learned anything about her now, that should do the trick."

"As it is, I can't even have the divorce papers served on her. Seriously, Mr. Sherington, instead of trying to make me out a murderer, which I'm not, why don't you try to trace Marian for me? That would be much more useful work, and I'd be quite ready to offer you a substantial fee in the event of success." He smiled inquiringly.

"I intend to trace your wife, Mr. Warrington," Roger said significantly. "And there'll be no question of fee."

"Oh, just as you like. Still, let me give you a pointer. Try an interview with our local philanderer, Major Cresswell, out at Filleys—about a mile along the Axminster road. I don't say he can help you, but if any one round here can he's the most likely person."

Somewhat stiffly Roger took his leave. He did not usually mind having his leg pulled, but there were occasions when it seemed to him out of place. Pondering, he walked absently through the sunny little town and took the first road that offered on the other side. He felt he needed exercise, to help in sorting out the impressions of this ambiguous interview. Not even the last exchange had been able to make up his mind about Warrington.

Glancing at a sign-post, he saw that he was on the Axminster road. Glancing, twenty minutes later, at a name on a gate, he saw that he was abreast of Filleys. He turned in at the drive a little defiantly. Chance and no set purpose had brought him here. Very well. He would see what chance had to offer.

Filleys was one of those box-like Georgian houses, and Roger estimated that its grounds, and a field or two which obviously belonged to it, covered about six acres. The people living here would be comfortably off though not wealthy.

This time, discarding subterfuge, he sent in his own name and asked for Major Cresswell. The message came back that Major Cresswell was in the garden, and would Mr. Sheringham join him there. Led by a neat parlourmaid through a long, high-ceilinged drawing-room, Roger took the path indicated to him through the wide-open french windows to the rose-garden, where the major was pottering.

If Major Cresswell was Clearmouth's local philanderer, he certainly did not look the part. A tall man with a clipped moustache

and the typical soldier's small, round head, he advanced briskly, his face questioning. Roger realised that, this time, his name conveyed nothing.

"Good morning," he began, with a briskness to match the others. "I'm sorry to interrupt you, Major, but I'm making a few inquiries concerning the disappearance of Mrs Warrington, and I understand that you can help me."

The Major first looked astonished. Then he frowned. "Did Warrington tell you that?"

"Yes," Roger replied deliberately.

The Major's frown deepened. "Did he tell you why?"

"No."

"Then I will. Warrington suspected me of having an affair with his wife. The idea's absurd, of course, but the man was insanely jealous. I suppose this is a piece of petty spite."

"Then you can't tell me anything?"

"No more than any one else can around here, and no doubt you know that. I suppose you're from county headquarters?"

"I came over from there this morning," Roger agreed, realising that the other had mistaken him for a plain-clothes man.

"Well, I'm afraid I've nothing to tell you. Wish I had." The Major began to thaw. "How are you fellows getting on, eh? Got any clues?"

"Not much yet, I'm afraid."

"No. Nasty business. Give the neighbourhood a bad name."

"That's a lovely Mme Jules Bouche," Roger said suddenly. It was one of the few roses he could name, and he seized the opportunity eagerly. There is nothing like meeting a man on his own hobby to gain his confidence.

The Major's eye lightened at once. "You a rose-grower? Yes, by jove." He was off.

Chatting amiably, the two men circled the rose-garden. As they walked a butterfly, an ordinary cabbage-white, fluttered down and settled in a friendly way on the Major's sleeve. Still chatting, the Major swooped down on it with cupped hand, held it by one wing, and tore it in two like a scrap of white paper. "Don't often get a chance like that," he said. "Too many of those about this year. They've hardly left me a single lettuce."

At that moment a tall lady appeared in the drawing-room window and called commandingly. The Major's face took on the expression of a small boy who has not washed behind the ears.

"By jove, yes, that reminds me. I promised—yes, well, I'm sorry, Inspector, or whatever you are, but I can't help you. Er—you'll excuse me if—"

"Of course," said Roger, and turned towards the drive. His way took him close enough to the house to afford a good view of

a massive lady with a large nose and several determined chins, who appeared capable of dealing adequately with any number of small boys who had omitted to wash behind the ears

As Roger turned out of the drive into the road again a white butterfly was circling aimlessly above the gate

"You'd better not go in there, Miss Butterfly," Roger told it "There's a murderer of your sort about, at all events"

But seated again in the superintendent's little office a couple of hours later, Roger had to confess that his interview with the possible other kind of murderer had been mainly negative. He recounted its progress and admitted the debacle in the end, while the superintendent shook a sympathetic head

"He advised me to go and see a Major Cresswell, and I did, but, of course, with no results. The local philanderer, Warrington called him. I gather he was jealous. Well, it's all very difficult, Superintendent. I hardly know what to say"

"Difficult it is, sir, and that's a fact," agreed the superintendent heartily

Roger stared at his shoes. It was not often that he found himself unable to make up his mind about a man, but Warrington certainly had him flummoxed. On the surface so genial, so humorous, yet underneath what? In any case, there was so little to go on. What were Warrington's hobbies? According to his own account, the man had seemed horrified by his wife's infidelity, but what about himself? Was there even another woman?

"Tell me, Superintendent," Roger said suddenly, "what's your opinion of the man? Your own private, personal opinion?"

The superintendent, who had been ruminating too, roused himself with a jerk. "Eh? What's that sir? Oh well, I've always found him a very pleasant gentleman, speaking personally, but it's true he has got a bit of a reputation for chasing the ladies. Can't hardly leave them alone, they say. But I dare say that's all gossip, too. We get a lot of gossip round here"

"He has, has he?" Roger sat up. "If true, that's important." He considered. "You've never heard whether there's supposed to be a special one, have you?"

"Well, I believe there's been a goodish bit of talk lately about him and Mrs Colbrook. At any rate, they say his car's been seen standing more than once outside her house. Mrs Colbrook's a widow—pretty she is, too—and lives in a little house, well, not much more than a cottage it is, out Lampton way, about eight miles from Clearmouth. Right in the country she is, hardly another house in sight. Very convenient, people said"

"That's most interesting, Superintendent"

"But it doesn't help us much with Mrs Warrington"

"Doesn't it? I'm not so sure" Roger spoke energetically

"Look here, let's try to reconstruct what might have happened, just from our very slight knowledge of the man—assuming, of course, that murder was committed. He's got a corpse on his hands, that's the position. Never mind for the moment how he came to kill her. Well, what's he going to do with it?"

"There's the sea, of course. But somehow I'm not so sure. I don't think I should like to trust the sea myself. Weights can break away. Clothes tear, ropes rot, chains rust. There are plenty of cases in criminal history where the sea has given up its murdered dead too quickly for convenience, and he'd know about all that. No, the sea may have a fifty-fifty chance, but not more. In any case, for our argument we'll eliminate the sea."

"So what else? Did he burn the body piecemeal? Did he try to dissolve it in acid? There'd be some kind of evidence for anything like that. No, he must have hidden it. And that amounts to hiding it in the ground—burying it. Well, where did he bury it?"

"Sounds like a tall order, to work that out."

"It does. But we can get a few pointers at least. We're dealing with a clever man, obviously, in spite of his appearance, and sometimes cleverness itself offers its own clues. We can be sure, for instance, that he didn't bury it in his own garden, or on any piece of ground that could be traced to him. On the other hand——" Roger paused. "On the other hand, the ground must have been familiar to him. We can take it for granted that he did the work at night. Well, he wouldn't go off into the darkness and just take any piece of land he came to. It would have to be a piece where he could be reasonably sure that the body would remain undiscovered."

"We're fairly close to Dartmoor here," put in the superintendent.

"Fairly, but not close enough," Roger countered. "He got the job done quickly. It must have been between midnight and four or five a.m. That allows no time to get to Dartmoor and back, and dig a grave. And knowing our man, we can assume that he dug a real grave, not a shallow hole. How long would that take? Not less than three hours. Probably four. That only leaves an hour or so for the journey. I'd wager Mrs. Warrington's body, if it was buried at all, is within 15 miles of Clearmouth."

"Maybe," said the superintendent. "Maybe."

"And what else can we deduce?" Roger went on, with growing enthusiasm. "Why, one thing, surely. Our murderer has all his wits about him. He's not going to dig in hard, stony ground. He's going to choose some place where the digging's easy. He lives in the country—he knows land, and he knows that easy digging

doesn't necessarily follow from a soft surface, or grass or marshy stuff and so on. It means land that's been worked.

"Well, what have we got to date? That the burial spot is a piece of cultivated ground within fifteen miles of Clearmouth, familiar to the murderer. And, we can add, where a standing car would be hidden or would arouse no comment from the rustic beholder. Well!" exclaimed Roger, jumping to his feet, "we know of a place that answers all those requirements, don't we? It all depends on one thing. Are the fields surrounding Mrs Colbrook's cottage put down to pasture this year or are they in corn or roots?"

The superintendent stared. "Mrs Colbrook's?" he repeated, in a voice of complete bewilderment.

"Certainly," Roger replied briskly. "It's worth a trial, at any rate. Come along, Superintendent. Get a couple of constables, with spades. We can be there in your car in under an hour."

"But what's Mrs Colbrook got to do with——"

"Come on, man!" cried Roger, dancing with impatience. "I tell you, I've got a hunch. Don't waste time."

Roger had a way with him. In less than an hour a still bewildered and openly sceptical superintendent, accompanied by two equally puzzled constables, was surveying with Roger the fields surrounding a solitary cottage that lay a couple of miles off the main road. As the superintendent had said, not another house was in sight.

"Well, perhaps you'll tell me where we're to begin digging, Mr Sheringham," said the officer heavily.

Roger, who had not the least idea either, was still convinced that he was on the right track. He threw his eyes over an orderly field of roots lying to their left.

"It's a good farmer who owns this land," he murmured. "Those swedes are planted as straight as an arrow-flight. Except *except*," Roger said loudly, "for that patch near the centre. Of course! That's what he did. He lifted the roots, put them to one side, and replanted them afterwards. Oh, the cunning fellow! But being pressed for time, and rather rattled, and working in the faint dawn, he didn't get the rows quite straight. Come along, men. That's our place."

"We must get permission first, Mr Sheringham," panted the superintendent in Roger's rear.

"Permission nothing," Roger said over his shoulder. "I'll take responsibility. I'll put the first spade in."

Ten minutes later the grins had disappeared from the faces of the two constables. One of them looked up from the work and said

"This ground's been dug over recently, and that's a fact."

Forty minutes later, the mystery of Mrs Warrington's whereabouts had been solved, very definitely

The superintendent did not stint his praises before he left to obtain a warrant for the arrest "Though how you hit on Major Cresswell instead of Mr Warrington, sir, still beats me"

Roger looked at him dumbly "Major Cresswell?" he just managed to repeat

"Yes I wondered at the time why you should want to know my opinion of him, and seem so interested in the talk about him and Mrs Colbrook It was real smart of you, Mr Sheringham"

Roger said nothing He had the wit to realise that there had been a misunderstanding the superintendent had thought he was still asking about the major when his mind had progressed to Warrington In any case, the reasoning had been correct from the data supplied

"Oh, Major Cresswell yes," he said rapidly "You see, I saw his wife A very determined lady And the major very much under her thumb Just imagine the situation Mrs Warrington arrived at midnight, hysterical, demanding to be taken in and this and that And the major had only been playing with her He lost his head, no doubt, when he found he couldn't quieten her Terrified of his wife hearing Yes, it's quite easy to reconstruct what happened" /

A sudden thought struck him The case was by no means solved yet The finding of Mrs Warrington's body, even in the vicinity of a house occupied by Major Cresswell's mistress, did not necessarily mean that he was the murderer There was no real evidence to connect him with the crime Warrington was a clever man Suppose he had an insane grudge against the major, and had buried the body here himself to throw suspicion on the man whom he suspected of seducing his wife there were all sorts of possibilities

"Wait a minute, Superintendent," he said "I don't think I should apply for that warrant yet You see, we've no real evidence that——" He broke off His eye had caught a white object lying on the ground a few yards away

He went over and examined it There were two tiny white scraps, one wedged against a stalk on the ground, the other caught up in the leaves of a plant Roger picked them up carefully and gave them to the superintendent

"You'd better take these Murderers don't seem able to keep well away, do they?"

The superintendent looked at the two broken scraps lying in his big palm "What's this, Mr Sheringham? A white butterfly?"

"The two halves of one And," said Roger soberly, "they're going to hang a man"

C Auguste Dupin

THE PURLOINED LETTER

By

EDGAR ALLAN POE

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième, No 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg-Saint-Germain*. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence, while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening, I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian Police.

We gave him a hearty welcome, for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G—'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves, but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes, and *not* exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" replied the prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! Who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little *too* self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused. "Oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, *is* the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words, but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then, I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known—this beyond a doubt, he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing *out* of the robber's possession, that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well, the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honour of a

personage of most exalted station, and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honour and peace are so jeopardized ”

“ But this ascendancy,” I interposed, “ would depend upon the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber Who would dare——”

“ The thief,” said G——, “ is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold The document in question—a letter, to be frank—had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it After a hurried and vain endeavour to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice At this juncture enters the Minister D—— His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow The minister decamped, leaving his own letter—one of no importance—upon the table.”

“ Here, then,” said Dupin to me, “ you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete—the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber ”

“ Yes,” replied the prefect, “ and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter But this, of course, cannot be done openly In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me ”

“ Than whom,” said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, “ no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined ”

“ You flatter me,” replied the prefect, “ but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained ”

“ It is clear,” said I, “ as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the minister, since it is this possession, and not any

employment of the letter, which bestows the power With the employment the power departs ”

“True,” said G——, “and upon this conviction I proceeded My first care was to make thorough search of the minister’s hotel, and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design ”

“But,” said I, “you are quite *au fait* in these investigations The Parisian police have done this thing often before ”

“Oh, yes, and for this reason I did not despair The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage He is frequently absent from home all night His servants are by no means numerous They sleep at a distance from their master’s apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking D——’s hotel My honour is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed ”

“But is it not possible,” I suggested, “that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?”

“This is barely possible,” said Dupin “The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment’s notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession ”

“Its susceptibility of being produced?” said I

“That is to say, of being *destroyed*,” said Dupin

“True,” I observed, “the paper is clearly then upon the premises As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question ”

“Entirely,” said the prefect “He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection ”

“You might have spared yourself this trouble,” said Dupin “D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings as a matter of course ”

“Not *altogether* a fool,” said G——, “but then he’s a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool ”

“True,” said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his

meerschau, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself "

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search "

"Why, the fact is, we took our time and we searched *everywhere* I have had long experience in these affairs I took the entire building, room by room, devoting the nights of a whole week to each We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment We opened every possible drawer, and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a *secret* drawer is impossible Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind The thing is *so* plain There is a certain amount of bulk—of space—to be accounted for in every cabinet Then we have accurate rules The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us After the cabinets we took the chairs The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ From the tables we removed the tops "

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article, then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way "

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise "

"But you could not have removed—you could not have taken to pieces *all* articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not, but we did better—we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple Any disorder in the gluing—any unusual gaping in the joints—would have sufficed to insure detection "

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets "

"That of course, and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house

itself We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed, then we scrutinised each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before "

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed, "you must have had a great deal of trouble "

"We had, but the reward offered is prodigious "

"You include the *grounds* about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with brick They gave us comparatively little trouble We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed "

"You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly, we opened every package and parcel, we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles "

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope "

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes "

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did "

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is *not* upon the premises, as you suppose "

"I fear you are right there," said the prefect "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough re-search of the premises "

"That is absolutely needless," replied G—— "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel "

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh, yes!" And here the prefect, producing a memorandum book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external, appearance of the missing document Soon after finishing the perusal of this description he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before

In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found

us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said

"Well, but G—— what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the minister?"

"Confound him, say I—yes, I made the re-examination however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labour lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal—a *very* liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely, but one thing I *will* say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual cheque for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day, and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really—think, G—— you have not exerted yourself—to the utmost in this matter. You might—do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How? In what way?"

"Why—puff, puff—you might—puff, puff—employ counsel in the matter, eh?—puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No, hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician as that of an imaginary individual.

"'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such, now, doctor, what would *you* have directed him to take?'"

"'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take *advice*, to be sure.'"

"But," said the prefect, a little discomposed, "I am *perfectly* willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would *really* give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer and producing a cheque-book, "you may as well fill me up a cheque for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets, then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen and, after several pauses

and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a cheque for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book, then, unlocking an *escritoire*, took thence a letter and gave it to the prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the cheque.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at D——'s hotel, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labours extended."

"So far as his labours extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind, and well executed, their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand, and many a school-boy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one, if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing, and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks 'Are they even or odd?' Our schoolboy replies, 'odd,' and loses, but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself 'The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd', he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the

first, he would have reasoned thus 'This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton, but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before I will therefore guess even', he guesses even, and wins Now this mode of reasoning in the school-boy, whom his fellows termed 'lucky'—what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent"

"It is," said Dupin, "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the *thorough* identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella"

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured"

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin, "and the prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity, and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*, but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below They have no variation of principle in their investigations, at best, when urged by some unusual emergency—by some extraordinary reward—they extend or exaggerate their old modes of *practice*, without touching their principles What, for example, in this case of D—, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinising with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration of the *application* of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity,

to which the prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed. Do you not see he has taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter—not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg—but, at least, in *some* out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg. And do you not see also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects, for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed—a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner—is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed, and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers, and where the case is of importance—or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude—the qualities in question have *never* been known to fail. You will now understand what I mean in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the prefect's examination—in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the prefect—its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified, and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets, this the prefect *feels*, and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools.”

“But is this really the poet?” I asked. “There are two brothers, I know, and both have attained reputation in letters. The minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet.”

“You are mistaken, I know him well, he is both. As poet *and* mathematician, he would reason well, as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the prefect.”

“You surprise me,” I said, “by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as *the reason par excellence*.”

“*Il y a parier,*” replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, “*‘que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre’*.” The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for

example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception, but if a term is of any importance—if words derive any value from applicability—then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra' about as much as, in Latin, '*ambitus*' implies '*ambition*,' '*religio*' religion,' or '*homines honesti*,' a set of *honourable* men."

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris, but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any special form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity, mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called *pure* algebra are abstract, or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation*—of form and quantity—is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually *untrue* that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails, for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of *relation*. But the mathematician argues, from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability—as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned *Mythology*, mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that 'although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.' With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the 'Pagan fables' are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that $x^2 + px$ was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q . Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where $x^2 + px$ is *not* altogether equal to q , and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavour to knock you down.

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, "that if the minister had been no more than

a mathematician, the prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this cheque. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intrigant*. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as *ruses*, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident.”

“Yes,” said I, “I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions.”

“The material world,” continued Dupin, “abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial, and thus some colour of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiae*, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent *momentum* is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again have you

ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state, or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely-lettered names, but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious, and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——, upon the fact that the document must always have been *at hand*, if he intended to use it to good purpose, and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search—the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the ministerial hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid special attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly, some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of paste-board, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the

middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle—as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D— cipher *very* conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D—, the minister himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the upper divisions of the rack.

“No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D— cipher, there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S— family. Here, the address, to the minister, was diminutive and feminine, there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided, the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive, the dirt, the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D—, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document, these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived, these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

“I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the minister, on a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack, and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinising the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, redirected, and resealed. I bade the minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

“The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus

engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a mob D—— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a facsimile (so far as regards externals), which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings, imitating the D—— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread

“The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behaviour of a man with a musket He had fired it among a crowd of women and children It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard When he had gone, D—— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay”

“But what purpose had you,” I asked, “in replacing the letter by a *facsimile*? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?”

“D——,” replied Dupin, “is a desperate man, and a man of nerve His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the ministerial presence alive The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more But I had an object apart from these considerations You know my political prepossessions In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned For eighteen months the minister has had her in his power She has now him in hers, since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni*, but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down In the present instance I have no sympathy—at least no pity—for him who descends He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the prefect terms ‘a certain personage,’ he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack”

“How? Did you put anything particular in it?”

“Why—it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank—that would have been insulting D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humouredly, that I should remember So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him

I thought it a pity not to give him a clue He is well acquainted with my MS , and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheets the words

—Un dessein si funeste,
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste

They are to be found in Crébillon's *Atrée* "

Ludovic Travers

A DROP TOO MUCH

By

CHRISTOPHER BUSH

LUDOVIC TRAVERS came in late and found a telephone message which his man Palmer had taken. Would Mr Travers run down to Brazenoak at about eleven in the morning and see Mrs Crane on a matter of extreme importance?

"Crane?" said Travers. Then Brazenoak recalled things.

"You've spelt the name wrongly," he said. "It should be C-r-a-i-g-n-e. Anything else, was there?"

"She was very apologetic, sir, and she said it was about Mr Craigne.

"Ah!" said Travers thoughtfully. His fingers went to his glasses, which was a trick of his when at a mental loss or on the verge of discovery.

"She said, sir, that if she heard nothing further from you she would expect you."

"Right," said Travers. "We'll leave at half-past nine unless something comes by the morning's post."

But he was feeling a vague disquiet. A clever woman, Charlotte Craigne, and one with whom he had never felt wholly at ease. Rupert, he knew better. He had backed an early show of his and had made money, but he had declined to touch the others, even "Trouble on Olympus," because of Craigne himself, certain deplorable tendencies he was already showing and exalted ideas. For if ever a man's head had been turned with success it had been Rupert Craigne's. He had the flair, and indeed the genius, of the born actor, and the looks and presence. Few men of his age had made more money or squandered it so recklessly. "Trouble on Olympus" alone had played to packed houses for three years, and it was only three months after its run that Rupert Craigne found himself in gaol.

Travers had seen him and Charlotte just before the first rumours got about, and he smiled drily as he recalled the bronzed Olympian beard, the curled Olympian hair, the large gestures and the almost besotted complacency.

No tour among the provincials for Rupert Craigne, and if Hollywood wanted him it would be on his own terms. Mean-

while he was commissioning Shaw to write a play for the autumn Travers had winced at that, as he was wincing now.

Charlotte had been a part of those posings and struttings, a Hera to his Zeus—or was it a Pallas Athene? Something of each perhaps, and Rupert's one virtue had been his indifference to other women.

Next morning, as the Rolls slipped quietly along towards the coast, Travers had a word with Palmer, whose particular experience and by-paths of knowledge had helped in many a knotty problem Superintendent Wharton—George to Travers and the General to the Yard—had an uncommonly high opinion of Palmer.

"Did you read the Craigne case when it was on?" Travers began.

Palmer was a great reader of those Sunday papers that specialise in drama, domestic and otherwise, and it was from their angle that Travers wished to review his own ideas.

"The Goodwood case, sir? Yes, sir, I remember it well. Sending telegrams from a country post office in an attempt to swindle the bookies. An ex-butler was in it, if I remember rightly, sir?"

"That's right," said Travers. "Sivley, butler to Craigne's wife's uncle—a Henry Potence. He'd retired and was living with a sister in the aforesaid country post office."

"I believe they were out to win a fortune, sir. I know people thought at the time the sentences were rather light."

"They didn't need to be heavy," Travers said, "at least as far as Craigne was concerned. He's come out of gaol a ruined man. His year was merely a gesture. Sivley got two years."

"A regular rogue, that one, sir. Making out he'd retired, and all the time, as his master let out in the witness-box, he'd been sacked, and his master gave out he'd retired because he'd been with him for years. And robbing him all the time, sir, I shouldn't wonder. And didn't he talk a bit big at the trial, sir?"

"Some cheap threats against Craigne and his late master," Travers said. "Talked of doing them both in when he came out. Still, that sort of talk is not uncommon. But what I'd like you to tell me is this. A month or two after Craigne came out he was arrested for drunkenness and creating a disturbance. Have you read anything about him since?"

"About a month ago, sir," Palmer said. "The same sort of thing, sir. Addressing a crowd and abusing the law. He's a man with a grievance, sir, that's what he is."

"He's a poseur, and always was," Travers said. "Instead of pulling himself together, he's trying to be a martyr."

"He has money, sir?"

"Not a bean," said Travers laconically. He might have added, except what he got from his wife. And, as Henry Potence had

washed his hands of him, and Charlotte was dependent on Potence, that looked like being precious little

Palmer peered at a direction-post, "Brazenoak, three miles, sir I thought I smelt the sea"

Travers smiled "What was it like? Patchouli? I mean, that's what one expects from Corburgh-on-Sea"

"A very select resort, I believe, sir," said the trusting Palmer

"Select's the word," said Travers "All the exclusiveness of the second-rate Stock Exchange guinness and a topping of stage froth All very Lido-ish and snobbish, and the least bit vulgar"

Everything about Brazenoak Grange looked comfortable and bulbous The old-fashioned bay windows bulged, the conservatory bulged, and old Henry Potence was bulging in a well-fed way from the porch above the bulging steps But Charlotte Craigne was slim as ever, in decorous black with a string of white beads, singled hair sleek and finger-nails a long, creamy red

But when the first greetings were over it was plain to Travers that Potence had no inkling of the real reason for the call Charlotte, coldly competent, directed the talk and led Travers off to view the August roses

"He's an old dear, of course," she said, "but he's simply got to be kept in the dark about all this" She turned soulful eyes on Travers "You were surprised to get my message?"

"Perhaps," said Travers deftly "But not ungratified"

"It's Rupert," she said, and left it wearily at that

"Bothering you, is he?"

"It wouldn't be that," she said "I'm sticking to Rupert as long as he lets me But this is something dreadful Sivley is out!"

"Really?" Then he smiled "You're taking those threats of his seriously? Sorry I didn't mean to recall all that"

"That's all right," she said "Do you think I can ever forget it all, even for a day? No"—and she shook her head—"this is something dreadful Rupert has seen Sivley and believes he's after him He thinks he'll kill him—and Uncle, too"

Travers checked the smile "You're not serious?"

"But I am" She turned her head and her lips puckered Her handkerchief was at her eyes and the tears began to come in earnest Travers felt desperately uncomfortable Somehow he could not quite connect Charlotte with tears

"I wouldn't take it seriously, honestly I wouldn't Tell your uncle and let him complain to the police"

"Uncle mustn't know a thing," she said, and gave her eyes a last dab "But he's been here He was seen prowling round the grounds last night!"

"No panic," Travers told her gently "Complain to the police, as I said, and have him arrested for loitering"

There was one of those unnatural silences, and Travers was wondering what lay behind those first revelations

"I'd better tell you," she suddenly said "I am worried about Sivley—dreadfully worried But it's about Rupert that I want you to help He's at Corburgh!"

"Good Lord!" Traver's fingers went to the horn-rims "That's the last place—sorry We're raking up all sorts of things again"

"That's all right," she told him bravely "I know what you're thinking People who used to flatter him and sponge on him, and now sneering behind his back"

The bitterness went and all at once her tone was urgent "Ludo, we've got to do something I simply can't speak to Uncle Henry And Rupert would always listen to you"

"Yes," said Travers, "that may be so, but what's he doing?"

"You know what a superb swimmer Rupert was? Well, he's going to use that to call attention to his grievances" She shook her head wearily "I know what you think, and every one else too But I don't think he was guilty He was just the tool of that dreadful man Sivley"

"Why not leave that?" Travers asked quietly "Rupert's going swimming at Corburgh, that's what I gather And why?"

"He's making a tour of all the resorts near here, and hiring a boat to give exhibitions That's just to vent his spite on Uncle, and make talk He's trying to force Uncle into giving him money"

"A sort of blackmail," said Travers "Collect a crowd and then talk And beginning at Corburgh When?"

"To-day," she told him quickly "I had a letter It's in the house and I'll show it to you At midday to-day Can't you see them all—jeering and hooting?"

"At midday?" Travers was suddenly alarmed "It's only half an hour off that now I think I'll push off at once and try to catch him before he begins his show"

"But I can't go like this," she told him wanly "Wait for me here I'll be back as soon as I can"

"But you're not thinking of——"

But she had already gone, and Travers was shaking an uneasy head and wishing to heaven he were elsewhere It would be a dreadful scene and most likely a vulgar one Rupert Cragne, giving a swimming exhibition to the cat-calls of that Corburgh crowd Rupert Cragne, golden-bearded and golden-locked, as he had been in "Trouble on Olympus" Jupiter, they had nicknamed him, and he had taken the jibe as a tribute But not the same hair and beard The prison barber had seen to that The new growth was a flaunting gesture, a defiance, and an egomania that would soon be something more dangerous and frightening

It was a long quarter of an hour when Charlotte came back to a restless Travers

"I simply couldn't get away before," she said "Your man has the car outside the gates I didn't want to alarm Uncle Henry We can slip out this way"

Travers drove the Rolls hard those six miles The lanes were narrow and winding and he had to take risks, but it was on the stroke of twelve when he breasted the rise and Corburgh lay beneath them There, in front of the long line of villa houses, was the curve of beach, garish as ever with awnings, tents and umbrellas Dotted about the sea were the heads of swimmers, and yet there seemed a curious hush Something was at the edge of the sea Crowding people, and looking out towards that boat

"We're too late He's begun!"

His lean finger pointed, but there had been no need to point. The boat was plain from that distance of 300 yards, with the fisherman sitting with oars idly in his hands In the stern stood a figure in a bathing costume of vivid emerald, and the sun shone on his golden beard and made an aureole about his head He was making wide sweeps with his arms, as if bowing with a cynical humility, then suddenly he leapt and dived and there was white in the water where he had been

"Oh, my God!"

That was Charlotte wailing Travers, still staring at that white patch, felt for her arm

"No use worrying now I'll see him when it's over"

The grip tightened, then all at once he was out of the car An arm had risen from the sea as if to make a frantic motion for help Travers smiled Some stunt perhaps A pretence of drowning to amuse the crowd But it wasn't! People were running He could hear shouts The man in the boat was calling Men were swimming

"Stay here," Travers said "Something's happened Steady now Steady!"

His rush was too late, for she had slithered sideways to the floor Palmer was through the other door

"She's fainted, sir"

"Can't I see it?" Then the panic was over "Slip up to that house there and fetch some one I must get down there and find out what's happened"

He scurried off down the hill, and making his way through the crowd ran full into Quint, the Holford-street art-dealer "Cramp, the poor devil," Quint said "Cramp, for a fiver Best thing for all concerned, from what they tell me"

The chatter of people was all about them Travers made his way out, found a fisherman, and hired his boat The man in

Craigne's boat said there was never a hope The sea was deep there, and the under-currents very strong And he said, rather shamefacedly, that it had been his job to pass round the hat in the middle of the show Travers tipped him half-a-crown, and was rowed back to the shore again

But he was so little disposed to give up hope that it was one o'clock when he came to the car again A brave Charlotte met him there Her eyes were red, but there was no tremor in her voice

"I know," she said "You needn't tell me "

Travers shook his head "There may be some hope I've left word just in case "

"There's no hope," she said "No hope "

Travers's hand fell on her shoulder "I'm afraid you're right But it was a merciful way He was under before a soul could get to him And now, shall we go home?"

"Home," she said, and shook her head "Not my home, and not his home "

"There," said Travers, and eased her gently to the car "Let's forget, just for a little while "

He nodded for Palmer to move the car on, and for a time she was so quiet that he was startled when she suddenly spoke

"It was cramp, was it?"

"Yes," said Travers gravely

Her hands fell on his arm "Could Sivley have done it? Could he?"

Travers patted her hand as if she were a child

"Nobody could have done it It was cramp No swimmer in the world can fight against cramp "

She shook her head determinedly "But if he was unwell If he was poisoned " She stared frightenedly "Rupert said Sivley would get him And he'd get Uncle Henry " The voice was shrilling Travers held her arm and spoke almost fiercely

"It's nonsense, I tell you That's the way to go mad, telling yourself things like that " He shook his head as she sank back "Take it easy and don't think of such things And let me have a word with your uncle You go straight upstairs "

But as the Rolls drew in at the short drive he saw two cars drawn up by the porch

"Hallo!" he said, cheerfully "You've got visitors That's going to make things awkward "

He helped her from the car Then at the door a uniformed constable appeared and put out a hand

"You can't come in here, sir—nor you, madame "

Travers stared "But this lady lives here And what on earth——"

"That's all right then, sir," the constable broke in. "Mrs Craigne, is it, madame?"

"That's right," said Travers "And my name's Travers What's going on here? Been a burglary, or a fire?"

"Neither, sir," the constable told him, quietly Then he glanced at Charlotte Craigne "Bad news for you, lady, and I'm sorry Your uncle's dead He's been stabbed"

Her lips parted, then she swayed Travers caught her as she fell, then hollered for a maid

But Charlotte Craigne had not fainted, and it was with the distant sound of sobbing in his ears that Travers turned to the constable

'Stabbed, you say?'

"Yes, sir And only a short time ago They're searching the house, sir, and we're expecting more men"

"Know who did it?"

"Yes, sir A man called Sivley Used to be a butler here Mr Potence always spent a bit of time in the rose garden before lunch, sir, and Sivley was seen going there The gardener who saw him, sir, thought he was still in sur, and then he thought he was coming for a reference or something Then he had a peep out of curiosity, and just in time to see Mr Potence on the ground"

"You think you'll soon have your hands on him?"

The constable smiled "I wouldn't mind betting any one a packet o' fags, sir, we have the bracelets on him long before I go to bed to-night."

But that matter of the capture of Sivley was more drawn-out than had at first seemed likely Search, watch, appeals, descriptions, all produced nothing, and Sivley had vanished more thoroughly than the central figure of a Maskelyne illusion At the end of 24 hours the Yard took over. In addition to the usual chief-inspector, George Wharton himself came down, for he had handled the Goodwood Case which had sent Sivley to gaol Wharton discovered that Sivley had been seen with Craigne two nights before the murder, in a side road behind Corburgh cliffs The two were having high words, and then, apparently, Craigne had talked the other round, and they had gone off together with some show of amiability

Where George Wharton was Travers would usually contrive to be But he would persist in driving the Rolls about the countryside, as if convinced that Sivley was lurking somewhere in the district

"You're wasting your time," Wharton told him "No houses have been broken into, have they? Where's he getting his food from, then?"

"There are ways and means," said Travers, with that irritating mysteriousness he could sometimes assume. "But he might have prepared for the crime. Or someone may be helping him."

Wharton grunted. "And who might that be?"

"Don't know," said Travers. "But I'll bet you a new hat he's still within ten miles of where we are now."

Wharton muttered something about a fool and his money, and added that he had bought himself a new hat only the previous week.

Henry Potence left less than the immense fortune with which rumour had credited him. The son, in Singapore, got the bulk, but Charlotte Cragne had 25,000, though tied up so tightly that had her husband been still alive he could never have hooked a finger round it. Travers saw her a day or two after the funeral, and offered sympathies and congratulations.

"I expect you're going to take a long, long rest," he said.

"I don't know," she said. "Some people would go back to the stage, but I dread that kind of publicity. It may be the States, but that's most confidential. A friend wishes me to go to her, and they won't know me out there, if I take my maiden name."

It was shortly after that, and on a Thursday morning, that Travers called up George Wharton, who was at the Yard.

"I've got some news for you," he said. "I may know where Sivley is."

Wharton gave a little gasp, then a grunt. "And where's that?"

"Can't tell you yet," Travers said. "There's a job of work first. I want you to wax the ends of your moustache and rig yourself out as a Frenchman. I know you can talk the lingo, but that's not the point. Be at Liverpool-street at two o'clock this afternoon. What for? Well, if you'll continue to listen, I'll tell you."

But it was half-past two when Travers reached the boat-train platform. A Frenchman in broad-brimmed hat was leaning from a corridor window, and Travers made for the nearest door. But as he entered the first-class compartment he gave a gasp of surprise.

"Good Lord! What on earth are you doing here?"

Charlotte Cragne seemed even more startled than himself.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I'm just going to Harwich to meet some people," he said. Then he gave a meaning nod at the elderly man in the far corner and she shook her head quickly as if to assure him that she was travelling alone. Travers spread papers and periodicals, and began a cheerful babble.

"You're meeting people too? But how extraordinary! And

what about your plans Do tell me all about them . Mind if I sit here opposite you?"

The train jerked off Then the corridor door was opened and there was the Frenchman, bowing politely and raising his hat

"This place, she is taken?"

"She is not," Travers assured him blandly, and moved the periodicals "Looks the babbling sort," he whispered to Charlotte, and took refuge behind a paper

In a minute or two the Frenchman had lured him from his retreat, and there was much chattering and gesticulation and explaining Then the Frenchman announced that he would take a little nap Travers lent him a periodical but after a few moments he laid it aside and settled to his corner

"Amusing old boy," whispered Travers "What about early tea? Like to have it here?"

He pushed the bell and a tea-basket was brought But the brakes were grinding and the train was nearing Colchester Up woke the Frenchman with a start The name on the signal-box caught his eye, and at once he moved across to the far window by the platform into which the train was moving

"I wave to my friends," he announced, and forthwith lowered the window, and leaning over the legs of the elderly man, proceeded with much energy to do so But as the train jerked to a halt he stepped quickly out to the platform and did his waving from there Travers had risen too and was standing with back to the corridor door Charlotte stared, then half rose, face suddenly whitening, for men were entering the compartment, and there was a scuffle and a quick, snarling cry

Travers drew the door open behind him, and looked down Charlotte's cold eyes met his own, and there were no tears on her hard, drawn face

"I'm afraid they'll be taking you, too I'm sorry—but "

Perhaps he felt a shame for the furtiveness of things, for all at once he was in the corridor and making for the platform by another door It was in the waiting-room that Wharton ultimately found him

"Well, they're both on their way back," he said "But that was the devil of a surprise you gave me when you slipped me that magazine! Me thinking it was Sivley all the time How you knew fair beats me I mean, how the blazes did Craigne work it?"

"It was child's play for a man with his knowledge and abilities," Travers said "The first thing to do was to hire a room, or a hut, on the front, and I shouldn't be surprised if Charlotte did that He'd grown that golden beard and aureole when he came out of gaol, and he sported them till the very last available hour of that morning Then he clipped his head, and shaved his chin and upper

lip and darkened the stubble. Then when he stepped into the fishermen's boat, a golden wig and a false beard, both most carefully prepared, had taken the place of the original Jupiter outfit. The costume he wore was a brilliant emerald, but beneath it was one of sober blue, and in the breast of that was hidden a neat, dark wig.

"The pretending drowning came. No head appeared, you may remember, but only an arm, for even then he was doubtless making his transformation. Off came wig, false beard and emerald costume, and were tucked into the tummy of the blue costume, while on went the neat, dark wig. All this while Craigie still swam well beneath the surface towards the shore. People were swimming towards where he had last been seen, and those on shore were staring in the same direction. So an ordinary person in dark hair and wearing an unobtrusive blue costume would come to the surface, undetected and unsuspected. Then he walked calmly to his bathing hut, or room, dressed, and so to Brazenoak, probably by motor-bike. In the woods near the house he put on the Sivley disguise which he had used before to prowl round the grounds. Then he went straight to the rose garden and had knifed Potence and had gone."

"Yes," said Wharton, and gave a grunt. "Simple, when you know how. A put-up job too, between him and his wife."

"Yes," said Travers ruefully. "Myself specially brought down to be a handy witness, since she knew I was not unconnected with the police. Potence might have lived another twenty years. She found a short cut."

Wharton suddenly thought of something. "But what about Sivley?"

"There's a gravel-pit, partly under water, two miles from Corburgh on the Ipswich road," Travers said. "Chaigne must have killed him. He knew when he was coming out and he lured him down to Corburgh with the deliberate intent of letting him be seen so as to give colour to that recalling of the threats. I've hunted the district and that's the only spot I can think of for Sivley."

"Maybe you're right," Wharton told him. "Now, what about spilling the beans? How'd you get on to it all?"

Travers smiled. "Just by thinking over things and finding they didn't fit. Then I invested a small sum in having Charlotte Chaigne watched, and when I knew she was taking the Harwich train from Liverpool-street—after hinting to me she was going to the States—I worked things out. Also, you see, she might have gone direct from Brazenoak to Harwich, and that led me to think she was meeting Rupert in London and travelling with him. Only a poseur of his kind would be capable of such a flamboyance."

"I don't want to know at all," said Wharton impatiently "I want to know how you first came to think something was wrong"

"Very well, then," said Travers "If you must know, you must It seemed to me, on thinking things over, that the Charlotte Craigne I'd known was crisp and slangy The woman who talked with me in the rose garden used words that came too stagily pat, like a part well learned Curious, too, how we should reach Corburgh at that precise moment It might have been all timed, and that recalled to me how she had not only spun out the conversation, but had kept me waiting in the rose garden while she removed traces of the tears Then there was Craigne He was nothing if not artistic, and to don that emerald costume with that golden beard and hair!" and Travers shuddered

"Not a lot to build a case on," Wharton told him grudgingly "Still it worked out right, I'll say that"

"By the way," Travers cut in, "I kept you hanging about in the train till we were through the tunnel, where I wanted to use the window as a mirror I'd told you to have your men at Colchester, but I wanted to be sure I hoped really to get through that disguise of his, but he was too well made up But I did catch an exchange of glances, and then I knew I could safely pass you the magazine and the message" He suddenly stopped "Something I've forgotten She cried, George, when she talked to me in the rose garden I thought for one very quick moment it was to enlist my sympathies and induce me to cough up money for Rupert But it wasn't that That made me wonder afterwards why she had used the little drops—what I might call, in fact, the drop too much"

"Drop too much?" said Wharton "You're referring to Craigne He tipped the bottle too much by all accounts"

"Not Craigne," said Travers "I'm referring to his wife"

"She was a tipper, too, was she?"

"Not quite," said Travers, fingers moving to his glasses "But she cried, George, long before anything happened The fainting fit she threw was as nothing to that Charlotte Craigne might throw a faint but she could never cry Yet she did She put her handkerchief to her nose and the tears streamed But there was a faint smell in the air—which was an unpardonable slip A Divorce Court smell"

Wharton grunted "And what the devil's that?"

Travers smiled "Palmer told me He noticed it in the car while I was down on the beach She cried to him too A Divorce Court smell was what one of his favourite Sunday authors calls it Very popular there, he says, among injured wives Ammonia applied sparingly and with much discretion to the handkerchief, to bring forth tears Unhappily Charlotte used just a drop too much"

Bobby Owen

STUDY OF THE OBVIOUS

By

E R PUNSHON

BOBBY OWEN was in a somewhat depressed mood as he slowly through the London streets

He had just left Oxford and almost simultaneously slump had burst upon the country with equal unexpected vigour True, he had his degree, but to-day even Honours seemed counted as of small worth, though to Bobby himself, saying farewell, had been most complimentary

"You know, Owen," he had said thoughtfully, "I never thought you would get through, it's a most pleasant surprise"

For the man who takes a double first causes no astonishment he has long since been marked down, he enters the examination room as a conqueror registering his triumph, the congratulations he receives are almost formal, he accepts them as probable Bradman accepts congratulations on the double or treble he scores in a test match It is merely that the expectation happened But that Bobby should have received his prize seemed to the tutor to border upon the miraculous

"It is not, Owen," the tutor went on musingly, "that entirely devoid of intelligence I have noticed certain qualities in you You possess a curious faculty for—er—what is it I believe, having your wits about you" The tutor looked envious, for his own wits were often far, far away—was told of him the wicked story that departing once on a tour he had given his wife sixpence and kissed the porter girl "You do not, as is often the case with those of superior gifts, look the obvious" The tutor sighed again, remembering a month or so ago he himself had, when crossing the street, looked the obvious in the shape of an extremely obvious man with the sequel of a week in bed—for himself, not for the 'bus, which hadn't taken much notice "Have you any plans for the future? The army for example? I understand from Lloyd George's writings, that in the army any show of intelligence is in the nature of a bar to promotion"

He had small taste for business, and anyhow business apparently had no place for him. The army in days of peace seemed to him a futile thing. For journalism he felt he possessed neither the imagination nor the thirst requisite. The law alarmed him, and for medicine and the church he knew himself unfitted. Of course, for him, as for all, even distant, relatives of such well known if impecunious peers as Lord Hirlpool, his uncle, a career as half-commission man on the Stock Exchange was always open. Bobby decided to leave it open. He felt a little sorry that his athletic record, though good, was not good enough to allow him to aspire to the scholastic profession. Rain began to fall as he strolled on, deep in somewhat gloomy thought; a heavy shower, but one that did not seem likely to last long. A tea shop was near, and as Bobby had neither hat, coat nor umbrella, he entered, seated himself at an empty table, and asked for a cup of coffee.

It was a quiet hour of the day and the shop was nearly empty, in fact one half of it was in darkness, roped off behind a large "Closed" notice. Few customers were present, only two men in a corner absorbed in a game of draughts and two ladies near them absorbed in a discussion on cooks. The waitresses were far off in an eager group, discussing their boys, the girl in the cash box was dozing, and there followed Bobby into the shop another man, who came in rather hurriedly, said something about "dodging the rain," dumped a small attache-case on a chair by Bobby's side, put down his hat on the table, said to Bobby "Keep an eye on these a minute," and walked on towards the absorbed draught players.

"Well, of all the cheek," thought Bobby, disturbed for a moment from his dark musings on the future.

He had not noticed the other much, had not had time indeed, and now a corner of the "T" shaped room hid him from sight. He just had a vague impression of a tall, upstanding personality, about Bobby's own age, height and build, wearing, like him, a light grey flannel suit. Bobby noticed, too, that the hat reposing on the table by him had a small feather stuck jauntily in the band, and he wondered vaguely if that perhaps were a sign its owner had been holiday making in the Tyrol.

There came into the shop a severe looking elderly woman of the manageress type, brisk and business-like, her resolute chin pushed firmly forward. Outside a policeman was now standing, almost in the doorway as if sheltering from the rain, though now that had ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The severe looking woman came straight up to Bobby's table and sat down at it.

"Well, of all the blessed cheek," thought Bobby, still more indignantly, for he shared to the full the instinctive British belief that so long as any other restaurant table was free, none had the right

to come to his. That was emphatically a thing not done. He even contemplated administering a well deserved rebuke by removing himself and his coffee to another table, and then he perceived that the woman was regarding him with a fixed attention that, had she been young and pretty, might have been flattering but that as she was neither seemed both embarrassing and puzzling. He put out his hand to his coffee. As it happened, he was wearing on one finger a large and prominent signet ring that had belonged to his father and that had engraved upon it the crest of his family—three fishes, supposed to be porpoises and vaguely believed by family legend to refer to a crusading ancestor's journey to the Holy Land. Apparently to see it more closely the woman leaned forward, her eyes fixed upon it. Then she gave a satisfied nod, as if now all was clear, got up and left the shop, neither the waitresses absorbed in comparing their boys, the dozing girl in the cash box, nor the girl behind the counter absorbed in knitting a jumper she meant to win a £1,000 prize with, paying her—or indeed anything else—the least attention.

A drowsy shop indeed where it seemed always afternoon.

Bobby looked at his hand and wondered what there was about it, or about his ring, that had interested her so much. He slipped off the ring to look at it more closely, with the idea that perhaps there was something about it he had never noticed before, and it slipped through his fingers splash into his coffee.

"Bother," said Bobby, and was about to fish it out with the spoon when a voice behind said

"That's him. I knew him again the very moment I saw him."

Bobby looked round. Behind him was the stern looking lady, returned in the company of a big man in a tweed suit.

"Is this yours?" said the big man, pointing to the attaché case on the chair by Bobby's side.

"No," answered Bobby. "Why?"

"Lady says it's hers," said the big man.

"Oh," said Bobby. "A fellow dumped it there just now. Said he would be back in a minute. He went down the shop somewhere."

"Don't see him," said the big man, looking round a shop obviously empty save for the staff, for themselves, for the two men playing draughts, for the two ladies discussing cooks. He said to the lady "Are you sure?"

"I can't swear to the attaché case," she answered. "Mine was new, and so is that, and it was the same size, but they all look the same. But I can swear to the man. It was his hat I saw first. I knew it because of the little feather in it. I think he saw me and that's why he came in here to hide. I came in, too, and had a good look to be sure. I knew his hat, and the clothes are the same, and though I only had a glimpse of his face I'm sure it's him. I noticed

specially the signet ring on his finger when he picked up my bag I saw his hand with the signet ring on it ever so plainly

"What on earth——?" began Bobby, quite bewildered

"CID," said the big man briefly, putting a card on the table "Lady's name is Miss Salter She spoke to a uniform man Uniform man saw me passing and called me Miss Salter had her bag stolen at Euston an hour ago She identifies you as the man who picked it up from a seat where she left it when she went to get some chocolate from an automatic machine Her statement is you got away in the crowd before she could do anything Any objection to my opening the attaché case?"

"Nothing to do with me," said Bobby "I told you—a fellow put it there just now I suppose he's the man the lady means That's his hat, too"

"Oh, yes," said the CID man "Where's yours?"

"I wasn't wearing one," Bobby answered

"Ah," said the CID man, and managed to invest that monosyllable with considerable significance

It began to dawn upon Bobby that he was in an extremely awkward position

The CID man was looking round the shop No one was visible except the staff, the two men playing draughts, the two women talking

"Where is he? this chap you're talking about?" he asked

"I don't know," Bobby answered, "I didn't notice, he walked on down the shop somewhere"

"Well, he's not there now, that's obvious," said the CID man

He opened the attaché case Within showed the contents Miss Salter had already described Then he went away and spoke to the waitresses, to the manageress who had now appeared, and came back to Bobby and said to him

"A uniform man has been at the door all the time No one has passed him There's no other way out except through the service room No one has been through there or could without being seen None of the staff has seen any one else Nor have the other customers"

"The waitresses were all too busy chattering to notice anything," Bobby protested uncomfortably

He was staring round the room, wondering what could have become of the fellow Indeed he could almost have believed himself he had imagined him but for the concrete evidence of the hat and the attaché case

"He's the man himself," said Miss Salter in her most stern tones "That's perfectly obvious I could swear to him anywhere I could never forget his face, it was stamped upon my memory"

"Coming quietly?" said the CID man to Bobby

Bobby took a drink of coffee. He perceived clearly that he was in need of all those wits his ability to keep which about him had so roused his tutor's admiration. But he was quite sure that the firm-chinned Miss Salter would swear to his identity through thick and thin, with fervour, emphasis, and conviction. In her private dictionary he felt instinctively there were for her personal use no such words as blunder, error, or mistake. He said:

"This is perfectly absurd. I can give you my name and address—lots of people know me. This lady told you she had hardly had a glimpse of whoever took her bag and now she says his features are stamped on her memory. She mentioned specially that he was wearing a signet ring—"

He held up his hands as he spoke to show he wore no ring. Miss Salter snorted and said:

"You've taken it off. It's in your pocket. That's obvious."

"You can look and see," said Bobby. "If you find any signet ring on me, I'll—I'll eat it." Privately he thought "drink it" would have been a more appropriate offer as he stirred up the few drops of coffee that covered the bottom of his cup—and the ring. "The lady's identification is absurd," he went on. "I might as well try to identify her by that spot of blood on her cheek and say it proves she's done murder."

"What do you mean? there isn't one," exclaimed Miss Salter indignantly, and snapped open her handbag to take out and consult her mirror, and the CID man looked, too, as with one hand Bobby pointed and with the other dexterously flicked the signet ring recovered from the coffee into the open handbag that now Miss Salter snapped to again as, reassured, she declared once more "Rubbish, there isn't one."

"It doesn't matter, quite unimportant," answered Bobby. "Let's go back to this signet ring I certainly haven't got. What was it like?"

"It had three little fishes on it, I saw them plainly," Miss Salter said. "If it's not in your pockets"—Bobby had turned these inside out while talking—"then you've swallowed it. Obvious."

"I'll be X-raved if you like," Bobby smiled. "More likely you've imagined it like the rest of it—or perhaps, so as to make it sound convincing you've described some ring of your own, sub-consciously or—consciously. One you've got in your handbag perhaps."

"I haven't," snapped Miss Salter and snapped open her bag again. "Oh, oh," she gasped, for there was the ring.

"Hullo," said the CID man, puzzled, obviously puzzled indeed.

"You put it there," Miss Salter cried, glaring at Bobby.

"Oh, really, come now," protested Bobby. "Three fishes on it,

just as she said," he pointed out to the CID man "Conclusive, eh? Quite obvious, I think"

The CID man remained puzzled

"Better both of you come along to the station," he said

"One minute," said Bobby "If the chap who put his hat and the attaché case down hasn't gone out again—well, he must be here still Obvious, eh?"

"Yes, but he isn't," pointed out the CID man, "that's even more obvious No one else in the shop"

"When the obvious disagrees, who's to decide?" murmured Bobby

He looked carefully all round Certainly no sign of the missing man was visible Bobby walked towards that part of the shop roped off from the rest, marked "closed," plunged in darkness since there all lights had been extinguished The manageress who had now appeared on the scene, called out.

"That part's closed, we don't serve there, no one there"

"A dull mind," explained Bobby, "investigates even the obvious"

He stepped over the rope and walked on A moment later he called "Here we are," and from behind one of the tables, between it and the wall, rose a tall young man of about Bobby's size and height, wearing, like him, a light grey suit, and, as Bobby noticed with extreme annoyance, on one finger a signet ring that had obviously been secured at a sixpenny store for perhaps, half that sum

"Oh, it's you, Tommy High, is it?" said the CID man

"It's a fair cop," said the gentleman addressed as Tommy High He jerked a thumb at Bobby "Hoped he'd lose his head and kick up a row and give me a chance to clear," he explained

"Dirty trick, putting it on me," growled Bobby, now that the danger was over knowing deadly fear as he realised how narrow his escape had been

"No malice about it, mate," protested the other amiably. "We've all got to take our luck as it comes"

Bobby nearly choked but found no adequate reply

The CID man said to Miss Salter

"Do you identify him?"

"I could swear to him anywhere," she answered emphatically "I could never forget his face, it's graven in my memory"

Then she added, triumphantly

"Besides, look, there's his signet ring, just as I said"

To Bobby, the CID man said

"Lucky for you you kept your wits about you You might easily have got sent up on the lady's identification and the hat and the

bag on your table " He added " I suppose you flicked that ring into her handbag when we weren't looking?"

" Had to get time somehow," Bobby answered " It made you doubt her story or you might have walked me off right away "

" So I might," agreed the other " Quite smart You ought to be in the police yourself "

And in a flash Bobby perceived that his problem was solved, his future career settled

" How do you set about joining?" he asked

The C I D man told him

Mr. Pinkerton

POLICEMAN'S CAPE

By

DAVID FROME

MR EVAN PINKERTON stopped abruptly, clutched his steel-rimmed spectacles and stared, blinking, ahead of him. For one dreadful moment the policeman's cape on the curving iron paling just beside the entrance to St Stephen's-close looked uncommonly like a man's body hanging there.

"Oh, dear!" Mr Pinkerton thought.

He glanced anxiously behind him to see if any one had seen him thinking it, and breathed thankfully. The road was quite empty. Nevertheless he scurried along a little faster. The Assistant-Commissioner of New Scotland Yard had said, not a month before, that the next time Mr Pinkerton found a dead body, anywhere, under any circumstances, he was going to hang him, just to make sure.

He had said it as a joke, of course. He had even winked at the Home Secretary's secretary, standing at the window. But the grey rabbit-like Welshman's tongue had gone quite dry and his heart quite icy nevertheless. The Home Secretary's secretary's "Ha, ha! Where there's so much smoke—eh, Sir Charles? Ha, ha!" had sounded peculiarly mirthless.

And then Mr Pinkerton, hurrying along toward the gate, stopped dead in his tracks again and stood staring stupidly. The thing hanging there! It was not a policeman's cape playing optical tricks in the dusk. It was a man. He was not hanging there exactly, he was caught and held, his arms out, pinioned between the iron palings. And he was dead. Mr Pinkerton knew that even before he saw the wet moving thing oozing malignantly from the spot under his shoulder and gathering in a slow darkening pool on the pavement.

Mr Pinkerton, his face a little white, looked up and down the road. There was no one in sight. The Home Secretary's secretary's "Ha, ha!" sounded suddenly in his ears, and his heart stopped beating for an instant. That is why he did probably the most foolish thing he had ever done in a life fairly compact of foolish frightened things, he scurried, as fast as he could without definitely bolting for it, past the dreadful inert object and along to the gate of St Stephen's-close.

The porter just coming from the opposite side of the court looked at him oddly

Mr Pinkerton moistened his dry lips "The meeting of the Society about fishing?" he stammered He fumbled nervously in his pocket for the card that Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith had given him, and held it out The porter looked at it

"Straight along through, sir," he said "You're a bit late They'll be showin' the pictures by now"

Mr Pinkerton glanced at his large silver watch, but his hand shook so that he could barely make out the time It was late, he knew that And ordinarily nothing would have induced him to go barging in, interrupting Mr King Usher's lecture on "Dangerous Fishing under Tropical Skies" But the thing out on the paling behind him was not ordinary

"I'll slip in quietly," he said "I I'm very much interested in tropical fish"

He scurried across the narrow paved court to the door the porter had indicated

"I shouldn't have said that," he thought wretchedly It was wrong to lie, of course But that was not the point In such cases as this gave every sign of becoming, it was a serious tactical blunder No one knew that better than Mr Pinkerton, for many years friend and gadfly on the stolid flank of his former lodger, Inspector J Humphrey Bull, of the CID He had seen many people caught up by the heels for less flagrant untruths than that

For actually Mr Pinkerton had no interest in fish whatsoever, and he had never fished, or had the faintest idea of fishing, in all his life He was only coming to hear Mr King Usher's lecture because Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith had invited him and given him his card It was small enough reward for returning the despatch-case of bearer bonds that Sir Timothy had left on the bench in Lincoln's Inn Fields

But that, of course, never occurred to Mr Pinkerton, whom nobody ever invited anywhere in the first place, and who had no need of a cash reward in the second For Mr Pinkerton had been left a great deal of money, quite by accident, in the blessed departure of Mrs Pinkerton from this world, and he still had it, in spite of taxes, because he had never dared spend more than sixpence at a time for fear she would come back, bridging the gap of eternity by the sheer horror of seeing him squander her money

Very cautiously he pushed open the door of the hall and stopped dead for the third time The small hushed room was full of men, and they were all elegantly attired in evening dress

He had not thought of that Even if he had, the ancient green suit packed away in mothballs in the attic box-room in Golders Green would never have done He stood staring miserably down

at his shabby grey lounge suit, Tottenham Court-road, three guineas), one hand fumbling at his purple string tie and his narrow celluloid collar suddenly chokingly tight round his scrawny little neck, the other clutching painfully at his brown bowler hat

Then he reached back at the door knob But it was too late

The rich, charming and rather amused voice of the great sportsman Mr Usher came across rows of immaculate pink-pated old gentlemen

"There's a place here, sir "

He indicated a spot in the front row Mr Pinkerton swallowed very hard The pink-pated old gentlemen were all staring at him Sir Timothy would be one of them, of course There was nothing for it Mr Pinkerton could never have told how he got to the empty seat next to another empty seat in the front row He sat down, cold perspiration in tiny dots on his grey forehead, his eyes fixed mechanically on the lecturer and the stuffed shark's head on the table behind him, with the chromium barbs of a harpoon protruding from it

All he could see was the body outside, draped on the iron palings, and the dark pool of blood gathering, viscid slow, on the pavement Mr Usher was no doubt most lucid and interesting, but at the end, when he was coming to a brilliant close, Mr Pinkerton could not have told whether you fished for whales with a fly or a gaff, or whether Mr King Usher himself was black or white

"If Pounceby-Smith were here he could have told you the trouble we had in Guiana last year "

Mr Pinkerton sat up rigidly with a jerk, a queerly ominous emptiness in the pit of his stomach And then it happened, as, of course, it was bound to happen The door opened and a sergeant of police came in

Mr Usher's voice died down in slow surprise

"Sorry to interrupt you, gentlemen," the sergeant said "Does any gentleman here know Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith?"

There was a general murmur

"Then I'll ask you all to stay where you are for the present, if you please Sir Timothy's body has been found in the road outside He has been murdered "

In the stunned silence, in the choleric uproar that followed Mr Pinkerton, grey and shaken, realising only too well what was about to happen, stared down at his feet A sudden wave of nauseating fear surged through him The toe of his right boot was splotted with blood

He looked up The sergeant was standing by him and he was looking down at the toe of Mr Pinkerton's right boot with a curious intentness His voice sounded, stolid and polite, miles away "Will you come along with me, sir, please?"

Mr Pinkerton opened his mouth, but no sound came out of it. He went out through a foggy, noisy sea of white shirt-fronts and pink jowls all reeling biliously together

A voice spoke promptly as he entered the lodge

"That's 'im all right, sir"

Mr Pinkerton recognised the porter's voice. But he did not look at him. He was looking at the very large man seated at the table. The mild blue eyes of Inspector Bull were looking at him in an oddly placed mixture of doubt, annoyance and disgust.

"'E must 'ave pinched Sir Timothy's card after 'e stabbed 'im, sir"

Inspector Bull's eyes moved from the dejected figure of his former landlord to the porter and rested on him for a moment.

"That'll be all for the time," he said. The sergeant closed the door behind him.

Mr Pinkerton shook his head wretchedly in feeble protest.

"Hanky panky doesn't pay, Inspector Bull said severely.

"I—I didn't want to make you any trouble," Mr Pinkerton said meekly. "He was—he was dead when I came along, and I didn't think anybody had seen me. The road was empty——"

"Yes," said Inspector Bull. He said it heavily, with a sinister emphasis. "That's the trouble. No one's come out of the Close. The road's a dead end at the bottom, two constables were standing at the top. It *was* empty—and it had been empty for some time. The porter says there was at least fifteen minutes between the time the last people came and the time you showed up. It looks bad, Pinkerton."

Mr Pinkerton moistened his lips and looked down at the toe of his boot. He looked away quickly with a shudder.

"How do you happen to be here, anyway?" Bull asked.

Mr Pinkerton's heart sank with a sickening thud. The evidence was terrifyingly against him, his whole story was perfectly preposterous—and this sort of thing had happened so often. He really could not expect Bull to go on getting him out of trouble time and again. Not indefinitely.

"Sir Timothy asked me to come. He—he gave me his card."

Inspector Bull stared. "How did you come to know him, Pinkerton?" he asked coldly.

Mr Pinkerton swallowed.

"Well, you see, I was in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a lady was sitting on a bench. Pretty soon Sir Timothy came along. Of course, I didn't know it was Sir Timothy then. Well, you could see she'd been waiting for him. He sat down with her. Then, all of a sudden, she grabbed his arm and said something, and he got up and dashed off. Another man came along.

"But just before he'd got to the bench the lady spotted the

despatch case the first chap had left. You could see she was scared. She shoved it through the back of the bench out on to the grass. Then she got up and said, 'Hullo darling, isn't this lovely?—let's go and have some tea,' but the new man wanted to sit down. And all of a sudden he spotted the case there, and said 'Hullo, what's this?'

Mr Pinkerton hesitated, and blushed.

"So . . . well I nipped over and said, 'Sorry, I left my case,' and the lady said, 'Oh yes I noticed it when you moved,' and I . . . well, I took it back to my seat, and pretty soon they went away."

Inspector Bull shook his head very severely.

"Well, you see, she was very frightened."

Mr Pinkerton hesitated again.

"And she was very pretty," he added lamely. The late Mrs Pinkerton had never been at all pretty.

Bull shook his head still more severely.

"Then I waited a long time for the man to come and get his case, but he didn't, and finally the bell rang for closing the gardens, so I had to open the case to see whom it belonged to."

Mr Pinkerton gazed anxiously at the inspector. There was no sign of belief in the mild blue eyes. Still, Mr Pinkerton thought desperately, if any one in the world would believe it, it was Bull.

"I couldn't help seeing that it had a lot of bearer bonds in it. I mean, could I? But it did have Sir Timothy's name and address in it, too. So I took them to his house and said I'd found them. I didn't tell him about the lady shoving them off the bench, naturally, and apparently he didn't know it. He gave me a glass of sherry and asked me if I was interested in fishing, and he gave me a card for the lecture to-night."

Mr Pinkerton looked hopefully across the table. Inspector Bull was making squares and circles on the sheet of paper in front of him. Mr Pinkerton felt again, with a horrible sinking feeling, how utterly preposterous his story was—especially when told by a man not in evening dress who had blood spattered on his boot.

Bull looked up. "Sir Timothy was stabbed in the back," he said stolidly. "The divisional surgeon says the dagger went straight in under the shoulder blade. It must have been done by some one creeping up behind him in the street."

He continued to look very oddly at his former landlord.

"The queer thing is, Sir Timothy reported the loss of £10,000 in bearer bonds to the Yard Tuesday evening," he said. "He never reported they'd been returned."

Mr Pinkerton blinked in some excitement. For an instant he even forgot his own dismally involved position.

"Then it looks as if somebody that knew about the bonds

had . . . had stabbed him to get them Or . . . to keep them, of course Doesn't it?"

Inspector Bull nodded, with significant deliberation

Then Mr Pinkerton remembered about himself. "So that, if I . . . I knew about the bonds, and I was the only one in the road But then, why didn't I just keep them, in the first place?"

He stopped abruptly as another idea struck him

"He let me in himself, that night, so nobody knows I went to the house," he said "Oh dear!"

Inspector Bull continued to look at him

"But then, what did I do with the . . . I mean, where did I put the weapon? Have you . . . found it?"

Bull shook his head "Not yet"

There was a tap at the door A detective-constable entered

"No trace of it, Inspector We've been over everything"

He glanced at Mr Pinkerton

"The porter says he's sure this man went directly opposite to the hall door He didn't see him dispose of anything, and he couldn't have done it outside or round here It's not in the hall Then there's another thing, Inspector I caught the porter stowing this away in the coal bin He says he won it on Rhodes Scholar"

He handed Bull a small smudged bit of paper Bull unfolded it and spread it out on the table It was a five-pound note Bull took a small jeweller's glass out of his pocket, fixed it to his eye and studied the note

"Bring him in," he said "Keep after the dagger It's bound to be about somewhere"

Mr Pinkerton glanced timidly at the porter He was deeply relieved The shadow of the hangman seemed to be lifting a bit For one thing, there might be a concrete motive now

"Where did you get this, Shrubb?" Bull asked

The porter hesitated "I won it, on Rhodes Scholar, that's what I did," he said sullenly "I put a pound on him——"

Inspector Bull scowled savagely

"Maybe you can explain how it's got fresh blood on it?" he said curtly

The porter's face went suddenly white

"I warn you——"

Shrubb shook his head

"No ruddy use warnin' me, sir I never murdered Sir Timothy It was this bloke 'ere"

Mr Pinkerton, edging a little nearer Inspector Bull, listened, completely fascinated The porter, according to his story, had gone outside after Mr Pinkerton had entered the hall, to see if

Sir Timothy was coming, and found his body on the palings. He had started to put in a call when he saw the five-pound note in the road next to Sir Timothy's hat. P. C. Nevins was coming down from the top of the road. Feeling that the obvious murderer had gone into the hall, and could not get away, Nevins being already there, he had pocketed the note.

He had heard nothing during the quarter of an hour before. Most of that time he had not been in the lodge. Mr. Abel, the secretary of the Society, had told him to put a new globe in the cloakroom light.

"I 'ad to go up to the office to get a new one. I got back just as this gentleman come in. I wasn't goin' to let 'im in, not till 'e pulls out one of Sir Timothy's cards, which 'e pinches off 'is dead body."

Mr. Pinkerton shuddered a little.

"All right," Bull said. "You wait outside."

He chewed one end of his tawny moustache and made squares and circles on the paper in front of him. He shook his head.

"I can't see you killing somebody to get his bonds, Pinkerton," he said. "But it's queer. That passage was certainly empty. Let's see this secretary."

Mr. Pinkerton faced the members of the Society with considerably greater ease, now that he could stay close to Inspector Bull's very bulky figure. He noticed that the Society were not nearly so old or bald or rosy-gilled as they had seemed. In fact one or two of them looked rather grey and definitely seedy. Especially Mr. Abel, the honorary secretary.

Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith, it appeared, was president of the Society. He had secured the valuable services of Mr. King Usher for the evening. Mr. Usher was just back from South America after a three months' cruise.

Mr. Abel could state positively that the last three members of the audience—barring Mr. Pinkerton—had arrived together. They were not only agreed in maintaining that Sir Timothy's body was not on the paling outside when they came, Mr. Abel had in fact spoken to him on the phone after their arrival. Sir Timothy had rung up to ask them to go on with it, as he would be a bit late. They had, however, waited, in fact, for half an hour. They had then begun, and had been going for some fifteen minutes when Mr. Pinkerton arrived.

Mr. Abel had understood that Sir Timothy was introducing a guest. Moreover, he had recognised Mr. Pinkerton as the man he had seen leaving Sir Timothy's house in Chandros-street about ten o'clock on Tuesday. He had dropped in to see Sir Timothy about the Society minutes.

It was true that the porter Shrubbs had been sent for a light globe.

Mr Usher had gone into the cloak-room and found that the light did not go on Mr Abel had struck a match and found the globe gone It was annoying, as the lecturer had to arrange his exhibits there They had previously had trouble about the disappearance of small items of the sort Sir Timothy, whose company owned the Close, had felt Shrubbs responsible, in fact, he was under notice at the moment

Bull chewed his moustache thoughtfully

"Did he make trouble when he was given notice?"

"Shrubbs? Oh, no, he's been uncommonly civil about it"

"It's a strange case," Bull said placidly "Sir Timothy was stabbed in the back through the heart The assailant obviously came up behind him It's clear also, from the testimony of several witnesses, that no person has *left* here since Sir Timothy came Yet there's no weapon about My men are certain about that. Hard to conceal it in such a place, just on the spur of the moment Then there's that five pound note"

He looked intently at Mr Abel, noting the nervous face, sparse blond hair, wispy blond moustache Definitely on the weak side

"The five pound note?" said Mr King Usher Mr Pinkerton noticed his quick glance at the secretary

"I say, Abel That wouldn't——"

He stopped abruptly

"Wouldn't what, sir?" Bull asked

Mr Usher ran his lean fingers through his dark sun-bleached hair Mr Pinkerton noticed that his frosty blue eyes were definitely thoughtful

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all," he said "What's this about a five pound note?"

Bull explained Both men shook their heads A few members gathered round shook theirs It was very odd

"Do you recall where you were, Mr Abel, at, say, twenty minutes past nine?" Bull said

Mr Pinkerton, peering round his elbow, stared up at the honorary secretary

"Just here, I imagine, Inspector I was——"

Mr Usher spoke

"I say, Abel, wasn't it just about then we were hunting the porter? I noticed, because I thought if I didn't get on with it I'd have to cut out half the slides"

Mr Abel laughed nervously "Of course, I'd forgotten But Shrubbs wasn't at the lodge Do you remember? I'd sent him after a table in the cellar"

Something occurred to Mr Pinkerton suddenly The germ of an idea came into his head

"It's most annoying," Mr Abel said "how we have to leave

things till the last moment Of course, it's most kind of Sir Timothy to let us use this room It's their directors' room, really "

Mr Pinkerton caught himself with a great effort from making a sudden choking gasp of excitement He tugged at Inspector Bull's sleeve with shaking fingers The three men looked down at him There was surprise on Bull's face, nervous anxiety on Mr. Abel's, a slight amusement on the great sportsman's

Mr Pinkerton mastered himself "May I take your torch?" he whispered

In one moment he was scuttling back across the court The lodge was empty He looked about There was a ragged curtain in the corner, behind it a small door Mr Pinkerton opened it and turned his light up the narrow staircase It would lead to the rooms above the gate He closed the door quickly behind him with a sigh of relief and a very pleasant feeling of safety He could quite easily feel a sharp point under his own left shoulder blade

At the top of the little staircase he hurried along a narrow hall to the left, stopped at the head of a wider stairs leading down into the court, then opened the door to his right and turned his beam into a small room opening on the front It was not hard—certainly not after his many years as potboy and scullery-maid in his wife's lodging-house in Golder's Green—to recognise it instantly as the porter's bedroom

Mr Pinkerton stood for an instant there, trembling with excitement, looking about him at the floor, at the grate in the corner He crossed to the window, opened it cautiously and peered out and down The white ball of light from the powerful torch fell on the pavement just below Sir Timothy was gone, but the dark splotch of blood was still there

Mr Pinkerton caught his breath sharply He disregarded the constable at the gate, peering curiously up at him, leaned far out of the window and brought the beam slowly up the white plaster face of the wall

Then he shouted down at the constable "Tell Inspector Bull to come!" he shouted "Tell him to come quickly!"

Bull crowded his great shoulders through the window, sweeping the torch up and down Mr Pinkerton, trying very hard to keep his hands from shaking, waited behind him

"It's there, you see," he said timidly

"What's where?" said Bull

"Blood," Mr Pinkerton said "Just a spot of blood on the plaster"

He waited Bull drew back into the room

"Don't you see?" Mr Pinkerton cried

"He was stabbed, from behind——" Bull began

"No, no, he wasn't at all!" Mr Pinkerton cried "That's the

whole point! That's just what you were supposed to think! But he wasn't. The road *was* empty!"

Bull shook his head "It——"

"He was just coming in," Mr Pinkerton said quickly "He was directly under this window, of course, and he went over to pick up a five pound note The note was dropped from this window, of course—just so that he *would* bend over And when he did well, of course, then he was a perfect target And when he was struck, why, he automatically straightened up, and then collapsed and was caught there on the paling Don't you see?"

A scowl gathered on Inspector Bull's heavy face

Mr Pinkerton hurried on

"Then he wiped the weapon clean and burned the paper he'd done it with—in the grate there"

"And went out and got the note?" Bull said slowly He crossed to the grate The beam rested for an instant on the charred paper there He turned back to Mr Pinkerton, and looked at him silently for an instant, and very oddly

"Well," he said, "have you found the weapon then, man?"

Mr Pinkerton adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles, blinking a little "Well," he said, "I know what it is And I *think* I can find it"

It was the third time that he had confronted the Society for the Prevention of the Sale of Game Fish for Domestic Purposes For a moment, in the suddenly silent little hall with all the faces turned toward him, he stood irresolute, staring timidly about Then his face lighted, and he marched—in so far as a grey little rabbit of a man can be said to march—up to the platform, where the honorary secretary stood by the lecturer

"If you don't mind," Mr Pinkerton said meekly

Mr Abel moved to one side

Mr Pinkerton reached out one hand, and drew the chromium-plated harpoon out of the head of Mr King Usher's preserved shark It came out quite readily, to his great relief a shining steel shaft with a dagger point leaving behind it, where they had been neatly inserted, the barbs that apparently held it there

Mr Pinkerton turned and held it up so that Inspector Bull could see the thin line attached to the butt, turned back to the table, and picked up the small harpoon gun with its cylindrical reel

Then he rather more than darted to Inspector Bull's side, for there was a look of cold ferocity on Mr King Usher's handsome face that he did not like at all

"It was quite simple, really," he said, a little breathlessly "He'd filed off the barbs that make the harpoon stick He pinched the light globe to get rid of the secretary and the porter, and he ran up to the porter's room and just shot Sir Timothy as he was coming

in, with this gun It it must have a very light charge, and would make hardly any noise Then he reeled in the harpoon, and it was easy—and clever too—when he'd got back to the cloak-room to hide it in the most obvious possible place, and put it right up in front of everybody This gun's rather a special one . made for rather big fish ”

It was possibly a bit late, but the proprietor of the King's Arms pushed two pints of bitter across the bar Mr Pinkerton raised his with only a momentary qualm The late Mrs Pinkerton had been a fanatical teetotaler

“It wasn't quite fair, not really,” he said “You see, when I went back to the lecture hall with you, I wasn't so so upset And I recognised Mr King Usher He was the lady's husband ”

Uncle Abner

A TWILIGHT ADVENTURE

By

M DAVISSON POST

IT was a strange scene that we approached. Before a cross road leading into a grove of beech trees, a man sat on his horse with a rifle across his saddle. He did not speak until we were before him in the road, and then his words were sinister.

"Ride on!" he said.

But my Uncle Abner did not ride on. He pulled up his big chestnut and looked calmly at the man.

"You speak like one having authority," he said.

The man answered with an oath.

"Ride on, or you'll get into trouble!"

"I am accustomed to trouble," replied my uncle with great composure, "you must give me a better reason."

"I'll give you hell!" growled the man. "Ride on!"

Abner's eyes travelled over the speaker with a deliberate scrutiny.

"It is not yours to give," he said, "although possibly to receive. Are the roads of Virginia held by arms?"

"This one is," replied the man.

"I think not," replied my Uncle Abner, and, touching his horse with his heel, he turned into the cross-road.

The man seized his weapon, and I heard the hammer click under his thumb. Abner must have heard it, too, but he did not turn his broad back. He only called to me in his usual matter-of-fact voice.

"Go on, Martin, I will overtake you."

The man brought his gun up to his middle, but he did not shoot. He was like all those who undertake to command obedience without having first determined precisely what they will do if their orders are disregarded. He was prepared to threaten with desperate words, but not to support that threat with a desperate act, and he hung there uncertain, cursing under his breath.

I would have gone on as my uncle had told me to do, but now the man came to a decision.

"No, by God!" he said, "if he goes in, you go in, too!"

And he seized my bridle and turned my horse into the cross-road, then he followed.

There is a long twilight in these hills. The sun departs, but the

day remains A sort of weird, dim, elfin day, that dawns at sunset, and envelops and possesses the world The land is full of light, but it is the light of no heavenly sun It is a light equal everywhere, as though the earth strove to illumine itself, and succeeded with that labour

The stars are not yet out Now and then a pale moon rides in the sky, but it has no power, and the light is not from it The wind is usually gone, the air is soft, and the fragrance of the fields fills it like a perfume The noises of the day and of the creatures that go about by day cease, and the noises of the night and of the creatures that haunt the night begin The bat swoops and circles in the maddest action, but without a sound The eye sees him, but the ear hears nothing The whippoorwill begins his plaintive cry, and one hears, but does not see

It is a world that we do not understand, for we are creatures of the sun, and we are fearful lest we come upon things at work here, of which we have no experience, and that may be able to justify themselves against our reason And so a man falls into silence when he travels in this twilight, and he looks and listens with his senses out on guard

It was an old wagon-road that we entered, with the grass growing between the ruts The horses travelled without a sound until we began to enter a grove of ancient beech trees, then the dead leaves cracked and rustled Abner did not look behind him, and so he did not know that I came He knew that some one followed, but he doubtless took it for the sentinel in the road And I did not speak

The man with the cocked gun rode grimly behind me I did not know whither we went or to what end We might be shot down from behind a tree or murdered in our saddles It was not a land where men took desperate measures upon a triviality And I knew that Abner rode into something that little men, lacking courage, would gladly have stayed out of

Presently my ear caught a sound, or, rather, a confused mingling of sounds, as of men digging in the earth It was faint, and some distance beyond us in the heart of the beech woods, but as we travelled the sound increased and I could distinguish the strokes of the mattock, and the thrust of the shovel and the clatter of the earth on the dry leaves

These sounds seemed at first to be before us, and then, a little later, off on our right-hand And finally, through the gray boles of the beech trees in the lowland, I saw two men at work digging a pit They had just begun their work, for there was little earth thrown out But there was a great heap of leaves that they had cleared away, and heavy cakes of the baked crust that the mattocks had pried up The length of the pit lay at right angles to the

road, and the men were working with their backs toward us. They were in their shirts and trousers, and the heavy mottled shadows thrown by the beech limbs hovered on their backs and shoulders like a flock of night birds. The earth was baked and hard, the mattock rang on it, and among the noises of their work they did not hear us.

I saw Abner look off at this strange labour, his head half-turned, but he did not stop and we went on. The old wagon-road made a turn into the low ground. I heard the sound of horses, and a moment later we came upon a dozen men.

I shall not easily forget that scene. The beech trees had been deadened by some settler who had chopped a ring around them, and they stood gaunt with a few tattered leaves, letting the weird twilight in. Some of the men stood about, others sat on the fallen trees, and others in their saddles. But upon every man of that grim company there was the air and aspect of one who waits for something to be finished.

An old man with a heavy iron-gray beard smoked a pipe, puffing out great mouthfuls of smoke with a sort of deliberate energy, another whittled a stick, cutting a bull with horns, and shaping his work with the nicest care, and still another traced letters on the pommel of his saddle with his thumbnail.

A little to one side a great pronged beech thrust out a gray arm, and under it two men sat on their horses, their elbows strapped to their bodies and their mouths gagged with a saddle-cloth. And behind them a man in his saddle was working with a colt halter, unravelling the twine that bound the headpiece and seeking thereby to get a greater length of rope.

This was the scene when I caught it first. But a moment later, when my uncle rode into it, the thing burst into furious life. Men sprang up, caught his horse by the bit and covered him with weapons. Some one called for the sentinel who rode behind me, and he galloped up. For a moment there was confusion. Then the big man who had smoked with such deliberation called out my uncle's name, others repeated it, and the panic was gone. But a ring of stern, determined faces were around him and before his horse, and with the passing of the flash of action there passed no whit of the grim purpose upon which these men were set.

My uncle looked about him.

"Lemuel Arnold," he said, "Nicholas Vance, Hiram Ward, you here!"

As my uncle named these men I knew them. They were cattle grazers. Ward was the big man with the pipe. The men with them were their renters and drovers.

Their lands lay nearest to the mountains. The geographical position made for feudal customs and a certain independence of action.

They were on the border, they were accustomed to say, and had to take care of themselves. And it ought to be written that they did take care of themselves with courage and decision, and on occasion they also took care of Virginia.

Their fathers had pushed the frontier of the dominion northward and westward and had held the land. They had fought the savage single-handed and desperately, by his own methods and with his own weapons. Ruthless and merciless, eye for eye and tooth for tooth, they returned what they were given.

They did not send to Virginia for militia when the savage came, they fought him at their doors, and followed him through the forest, and took their toll of death. They were hardier than he was, and their hands were heavier and bloodier, until the old men in the tribes of the Ohio Valley forbade these raids because they cost too much, and turned the war parties south into Kentucky.

Certain historians have written severely of these men and their ruthless methods, and prattled of humane warfare, but they wrote nursing their soft spines in the security of a civilisation which these men's hands had builded, and their words are hollow.

"Abner," said Ward, "let me speak plainly. We have got an account to settle with a couple of cattle thieves and we are not going to be interfered with. Cattle stealing and murder have got to stop in these hills. We've had enough of it."

"Well," replied my uncle, "I am the last man in Virginia to interfere with that. We have all had enough of it, and we are all determined that it must cease. But how do you propose to end it?"

"With a rope," said Ward.

"It is a good way," replied Abner, "when it is done the right way."

"What do you mean by the right way?" said Ward.

"I mean," answered my uncle, "that we have all agreed to a way and we ought to stick to our agreement. Now, I want to help you to put down cattle stealing and murder, but I want also to keep my word."

"And how have you given your word?"

"In the same way that you have given yours," said Abner, "and as every man here has given his. Our fathers found out that they could not manage the assassin and the thief when every man undertook to act for himself, so they got together and agreed upon a certain way to do these things. Now, we have indorsed what they agreed to, and promised to obey it, and I for one would like to keep my promise."

The big man's face was puzzled. Now it cleared.

"Hell!" he said. "You mean the law?"

"Call it what you like," replied Abner; "it is merely the agreement of everybody to do certain things in a certain way."

The man made a decisive gesture with a jerk of his head
"Well," he said, "we're going to do this thing our own way "

My uncle's face became thoughtful

"Then," he said, "you will injure some innocent people "

"You mean these two blacklegs?"

And Ward indicated the prisoners with a gesture of his thumb

My uncle lifted his face and looked at the two men some distance away beneath the great beech, as though he had but now observed them

"I was not thinking of them," he answered "I was thinking that if men like you and Lemuel Arnold and Nicholas Vance violate the law, lesser men will follow your example, and as you justify your act for security, they will justify theirs for revenge and plunder And so the law will go to pieces and a lot of weak and innocent people who depend upon it for security will be left unprotected "

These were words that I have remembered, because they put the danger of lynch law in a light I had not thought of But I saw that they would not move these determined men Their blood was up and they received them coldly

"Abner," said Ward, "we are not going to argue this thing with you There are times when men have to take the law into their own hands We live here at the foot of the mountains Our cattle are stolen and run across the border into Maryland We are tired of it and we intend to stop it

"Our lives and our property are menaced by a set of reckless desperate devils that we have determined to hunt down and hang to the first tree in sight We did not send for you You pushed your way in here, and now, if you are afraid of breaking the law, you can ride on, because we are going to break it—if to hang a pair of murderous devils is to break it "

I was astonished at my uncle's decision

"Well," he said, "if the law must be broken, I will stay and help you break it!"

"Very well," replied Ward, "but don't get a wrong notion in your head, Abner If you choose to stay, you put yourself on a footing with everybody else "

"And that is precisely what I want to do," replied Abner, "but as matters stand now, every man here has an advantage over me "

"What advantage, Abner?" said Ward

"The advantage," answered my uncle, "that he has heard all the evidence against your prisoners and is convinced that they are guilty "

"If that is all the advantage, Abner," replied Ward, "you shall not be denied it There has been so much cattle stealing here of late that our people living on the border finally got together and

determined to stop every drove going up into the mountains that wasn't accompanied by somebody that we knew was all right. This afternoon one of my men reported a little bunch of about a hundred steers on the road, and I stopped it. These two men were driving the cattle. I inquired if the cattle belonged to them and they replied that they were not the owners, but that they had been hired to take the drove over into Maryland. I did not know the men, and as they met my inquiries with oaths and imprecations, I was suspicious of them. I demanded the name of the owner who had hired them to drive the cattle. They said it was none of my damned business and went on. I raised the county. We overtook them, turned their cattle into a field, and brought them back until we could find out who the drove belonged to. On the road we met Bowers."

He turned and indicated the man who was working with the rope halter. I knew the man. He was a cattle shipper, somewhat involved in debt, but who managed to buy and sell and somehow keep his head above water.

"He told us the truth. Yesterday evening he had gone over on the Stone-Coal to look at Daniel Coopman's cattle. He had heard that some grazer from your county, Abner, was on the way up to buy the cattle for stockers. He wanted to get in ahead of your man, so he left home that evening and got to Coopman's place about sundown. He took a short cut on foot over the hill, and when he came out he saw a man on the opposite ridge where the road runs, ride away. The man seemed to have been sitting on his horse looking down into the little valley where Coopman's house stands. Bowers went down to the house, but Coopman was not there. The door was open, and Bowers says the house looked as though Coopman had just gone out of it and might come back any moment. There was no one about, because Coopman's wife had gone on a visit to her daughter, over the mountains, and the old man was alone.

"Bowers thought Coopman was out showing the cattle to the man whom he had just seen ride off, so he went out to the pasture field to look for him. He could not find him and he could not find the cattle. He came back to the house to wait until Coopman should come in. He sat down on the porch. As he sat there he noticed that the porch had been scrubbed and was still wet. He looked at it and saw that it had been scrubbed only at one place before the door. This seemed to him a little peculiar, and he wondered why Coopman had scrubbed his porch only in one place. He got up and as he went toward the door he saw that the jamb of the door was splintered at a point about half-way up. He examined this splintered place and presently discovered that it was a bullet hole.

"This alarmed him, and he went out into the yard. There he

saw a wagon track leading away from the house toward the road. In the weeds he found Coopman's watch. He picked it up and put it into his pocket. It was a big silver watch, with Coopman's name on it, and attached to it was a buckskin string. He followed the track to the gate, where it entered the road. He discovered then that the cattle had also passed through this gate. It was now night. Bowers went back, got Coopman's saddle horse out of the stable, rode him home, and followed the track of the cattle this morning, but he saw no trace of the drove until we met him."

"What did Shifflet and Twiggs say to this story?" inquired Abner.

"They did not hear it," answered Ward, "Bowers did not talk before them. He rode aside with us when we met him."

"Did Shifflet and Twiggs know Bowers?" said Abner.

"I don't know," replied Ward, "their talk was so foul when we stopped the drove that we had to tie their mouths up."

"Is that all?" said Abner.

Ward swore a great oath.

"No!" he said. "Do you think we would hang men on that? From what Bowers told us, we thought Shifflet and Twiggs had killed Daniel Coopman and driven off his cattle, but we wanted to be certain of it, so we set out to discover what they had done with Coopman's body after they had killed him and what they had done with the wagon. We followed the trail of the drove down to the Valley River. No wagon had crossed, but on the other side we found that a wagon and a drove of cattle had turned out of the road and gone along the basin of the river for about a mile through the woods. And there in a bend of the river we found where these devils had camped."

"There had been a great fire of logs very near to the river, but none of the ashes of this fire remained. From a circular space some twelve feet in diameter the ashes had all been shovelled off, the marks of the shovel being distinct. In the centre of the place where this fire had burned the ground had been scraped clean, but near the edges there were some traces of cinders and the ground was blackened. In the river at this point, just opposite the remains of the fire, was a natural washout or hole. We made a raft of logs, cut a pole with a fork on the end and dragged the river. We found most of the wagon iron, all showing the effect of fire. Then we fastened a tin bucket to a pole and fished the washout. We brought up cinders, buttons, buckles and pieces of bone."

Ward paused.

"That settled it, and we came back here to swing the devils up."

My uncle had listened very carefully, and now he spoke.

"What did the man say Twiggs and Shifflet?" said my uncle.

"Did they tell you that when you stopped the drove?"

"Now that," answered Ward, "was another piece of damning evidence. When we searched the men we found a pocket-book on Shifflet with a hundred and fifteen dollars and some odd cents. It was Daniel Coopman's pocket-book, because there was an old tax receipt in it that had slipped down between the leather and the lining.

"We asked Shifflet where he got it, and he said that the fifteen dollars and the change was his own money and that the hundred had been paid to him by the man who had hired them to drive the cattle. He explained his possession of the pocket-book by saying that this man had the money in it, and when he went to pay them he said that they might just as well take it, too."

"Who was this man?" said Abner.

"They will not tell who he was."

"Why not?"

"Now, Abner," cried Ward, "why not, indeed! Because there never was any such man. The story is a lie out of the whole cloth. Those two devils are guilty as hell. The proof is all dead against them."

"Well," replied my uncle, "what circumstantial evidence proves, depends a good deal on how you get started. It is a somewhat dangerous road to the truth, because all the sign-boards have a curious trick of pointing in the direction that you are going. Now, a man will never realise this unless he turns around and starts back, then he will see, to his amazement, that the sign-boards have also turned. But as long as his face is set one certain way, it is of no use to talk to him, he won't listen to you; and if he sees you going the other way, he will call you a fool."

"There is only one way in this case," said Ward.

"There are always two ways in every case," replied Abner, "that the suspected person is either guilty or innocent. You have started upon the theory that Shifflet and Twiggs are guilty. Now, suppose you had started the other way, what then?"

"Well," said Ward, "what then?"

"This, then," continued Abner. "You stop Shifflet and Twiggs on the road with Daniel Coopman's cattle, and they tell you that a man has hired them to drive this drove into Maryland. You believe that and start out to find the man. You find Bowers!"

Bowers went deadly white.

"For God's sake, Abner!" he said.

But my uncle was merciless and he drove in the conclusion.

"What then?"

There was no answer, but the faces of the men about my uncle turned toward the man whose trembling hands fingered the rope that he was preparing for another.

"But the things we found, Abner?" said Ward.

"What do they prove," continued my uncle, "now that the sign-boards are turned? That somebody killed Daniel Coopman and drove off his cattle, and afterwards destroyed the body and the wagon in which it was hauled away. But who did that?"

The men who were driving Daniel Coopman's cattle, or the man who was riding Daniel Coopman's horse, and carrying Daniel Coopman's watch in his pocket?"

Ward's face was a study in expression.

"Ah!" cried Abner. "Remember that the sign boards have turned about. And what do they point to if we read them on the way we are going now? The man who killed Coopman was afraid to be found with the cattle, so he hired Twiggs and Shifflet to drive them into Maryland for him and follows on another road."

"But his story, Abner?" said Ward.

"And what of it?" replied my uncle. "He is taken and he must explain how he comes by the horse that he rides, and the watch that he carries, and he must find the criminal. Well, he tells you a tale to fit the facts that you will find when you go back to look, and he gives you Shifflet and Twiggs to hang."

I never saw a man in more mortal terror than Jacob Bowers. He sat in his saddle like a man bewildered.

"My God!" he said, and again he repeated it, and again.

And he had cause for that terror on him. My uncle was stern and ruthless. The pendulum had swung the other way, and the lawless monster that Bowers had allied was now turning on himself. He saw it and his joints were unhinged with fear.

A voice crashed out of the ring of desperate men, uttering the changed opinion.

"By God!" it cried, "we've got the right man now."

And one caught the rope out of Bowers' hand.

But my Uncle Abner rode in on them.

"Are you sure about that?" he said.

"Sure!" they echoed. "You have shown it yourself, Abner."

"No," replied my uncle, "I have not shown it. I have shown merely whether circumstantial evidence leads us when we go hotfoot after a theory. Bowers says that there was a man on the hill above Daniel Coopman's house, and this man will know that he did not kill Daniel Coopman and that his story is the truth."

They laughed in my uncle's face.

"Do you believe that there was any such person?"

My uncle seemed to increase in stature, and his voice became big and dominant.

"I do," he said, "because I am the man!"

They had got their lesson, and we rode out with Shifflet and Twiggs to a legal trial.

Miss Marple

THE IDOL HOUSE OF ASTARTE

By

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Raymond West, author, Joyce Lemprière, artist, Sir Henry Clithering, ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, Dr. Pender, elderly clergyman, Mr Petherick, solicitor, and Miss Marple, Raymond's aunt, straight from the pages of a Victorian novel—these six are the Tuesday Night Club. Each week they meet to hear one of their number propound a problem, some mystery of which he has personal knowledge, and of which he knows the answer. To-night it is the turn of the village parson, Dr Pender.

“AND now, Dr Pender, what are you going to tell us?”

The old clergyman smiled gently

“My life has been passed in quiet places,” he said
“Very few eventful happenings have come my way. Yet once, when I was a young man, I had one very strange and tragic experience.”

“Ah!” said Joyce Lemprière encouragingly

“I have never forgotten it,” continued the clergyman. “It made a profound impression on me at the time, and to this day by a slight effort of memory I can feel again the awe and horror of that terrible moment when I saw a man stricken to death by apparently no mortal agency.”

“You make me feel quite creepy, Pender,” complained Sir Henry

“It made me feel creepy, as you call it,” replied the other.
“Since then I have never laughed at the people who use the word atmosphere. There is such a thing. There are certain places imbued and saturated with good or evil influences which can make their power felt.”

“That house, The Larches, is a very unhappy one,” remarked Miss Marple. “Old Mr Smithers lost all his money and had to leave it, then the Carslakes took it and Johnny Carslake fell downstairs and broke his leg and Mrs Carslake had to go away to the south of France for her health, and now the Burghdens have got it and I hear that poor Mr Burden has got to have an operation almost immediately.”

“There is, I think, rather too much superstition about such

matters, said Mr Petherick "A lot of damage is done to property by foolish reports heedlessly circulated"

"I have known one or two 'ghosts' that have had a very robust personality," remarked Sir Henry with a chuckle

"I think," said Raymond, "we should allow Dr Pender to go on with his story"

Joyce got up and switched off the two lamps, leaving the room lit only by the flickering firelight

"Atmosphere," she said "Now we can get along"

Dr Pender smiled at her, and leaning back in his chair and taking off his pince-nez, he began his story in a gentle reminiscent voice

"I don't know whether any of you know Dartmoor at all The place I am telling you about is situated on the borders of Dartmoor It was a very charming property, though it had been on the market without finding a purchaser for several years The situation was perhaps a trifle bleak in winter, but the views were magnificent and there were certain curious and original features about the property itself It was bought by a man called Haydon—Sir Richard Haydon I had known him in his college days, and though I had lost sight of him for some years, the old ties of friendship still held, and I accepted with pleasure his invitation to go down to Silent Grove, as his new purchase was called

"The house party was not a very large one There was Richard Haydon himself, and his cousin, Elliot Haydon There was a Lady Mannering with a pale, rather inconspicuous daughter called Violet There was a Captain Rogers and his wife, hard riding, weather-beaten people, who lived only for horses and hunting There was also a young Dr Symonds and there was Miss Diana Ashley I knew something about the last named Her picture was very often in the Society papers and she was one of the notorious beauties of the Season Her appearance was indeed very striking She was dark and tall, with a beautiful skin of an even tint of pale cream and her half-closed dark eyes set slantways in her head gave her a curiously piquant oriental appearance She had, too, a wonderful speaking voice, deep-toned and bell-like

"I saw at once that my friend Richard Haydon was very much attracted by her, and I guessed that the whole party was merely arranged as a setting for her Of her own feelings I was not so sure She was capricious in her favours One day talking to Richard and excluding every one else from her notice, and another day she would favour his cousin, Elliot, and appear hardly to notice that such a person as Richard existed and then again she would bestow the most bewitching smiles upon the quiet and retiring Dr Symonds

"On the morning after my arrival our host showed us all over

the place. The house itself was unremarkable, a good solid house built of Devonshire granite. Built to withstand time and exposure. It was unromantic but very comfortable. From the windows of it one looked out over the panorama of the Moor, vast rolling hills crowned with weather-beaten Tors.

"On the slopes of the Tor nearest to us were various hut circles, relics of the bygone days of the late Stone Age. On another hill was a barrow which had recently been excavated, and in which certain bronze implements had been found. Haydon was by way of being interested in antiquarian matters and he talked to us with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm. This particular spot, he explained, was particularly rich in relics of the past.

"Neolithic hut dwellers, Druids, Romans, and even traces of the early Phœnicians were to be found.

"'But this place is the most interesting of all,' he said. 'You know its name—Silent Grove. Well, it is easy enough to see what it takes its name from.'

"He pointed with his hand. That particular part of the country was bare enough—rocks, heather and bracken, but about a hundred yards from the house there was a densely planted grove of trees.

"'That is a relic of very early days,' said Haydon, 'The trees have died and been replanted, but on the whole it has been kept very much as it used to be—perhaps in the time of the Phœnician settlers. Come and look at it.'

"We all followed him. As we entered the grove of trees a curious oppression came over me. I think it was the silence. No birds seemed to nest in these trees. There was a feeling about it of desolation and horror. I saw Haydon looking at me with a curious smile.

"'Any feeling about this place, Pender?' he asked me. 'Antagonism now? Or uneasiness?'

"'I don't like it,' I said quietly.

"'You are within your rights. This was a stronghold of one of the ancient enemies of your faith. This is the Grove of Astarte.'

"'Astarte?'

"'Astarte, or Ishtar, or Ashtoreth, or whatever you choose to call her. I prefer the Phœnician name of Astarte. There is, I believe, one known Grove of Astarte in this country—in the North on the Wall. I have no evidence, but I like to believe that we have a true and authentic Grove of Astarte here. Here, within this dense circle of trees, sacred rites were performed.'

"'Sacred rites,' murmured Diana Ashley. Her eyes had a dreamy far-away look. 'What were they, I wonder?'

"'Not very reputable by all accounts,' said Captain Rogers with a loud unmeaning laugh. 'Rather hot stuff, I imagine.'

"Haydon paid no attention to him

"'In the centre of the Grove there should be a Temple,' he said 'I can't run to Temples, but I have indulged in a little fancy of my own'

"We had at that moment stepped out into a little clearing in the centre of the trees. In the middle of it was something not unlike a summer-house made of stone. Diana Ashley looked inquiringly at Haydon

"'I call it The Idol House,' he said 'It is the Idol House of Astarte'

"He led the way up to it. Inside, on a rude ebony pillar, there reposed a curious little image representing a woman with crescent horns, seated on a lion

"'Astarte of the Phœnicians,' said Haydon, 'the Goddess of the Moon'

"'The Goddess of the Moon,' cried Diana 'Oh, do let us have a wild orgy to-night. Fancy dress. And we will come out here in the moonlight and celebrate the rites of Astarte'

"I made a sudden movement and Elliot Haydon, Richard's cousin, turned quickly to me

"'You don't like all this, do you, Padre?' he said

"'No,' I said gravely 'I don't'

"He looked at me curiously 'But it is only tomfoolery. Dick can't know that this really is a sacred grove. It is just a fancy of his, he likes to play with the idea. And anyway, if it were—'

"If it were?"

"'Well——' he laughed uncomfortably 'You don't believe in that sort of thing, do you? You, a parson'

"'I am not sure that as a parson I ought not to believe in it.'

"'But that sort of thing is all finished and done with'

"'I am not so sure,' I said musingly 'I only know this. I am not as a rule a sensitive man to atmosphere, but ever since I entered this grove of trees I have felt a curious impression and sense of evil and menace all round me'

"He glanced uneasily over his shoulder

"'Yes, he said 'It is—it is queer, somehow. I know what you mean but I suppose it is only our imagination makes us feel like that. What do you say, Symonds?'

"The doctor was silent a minute or two before he replied. Then he said quietly

"'I don't like it. I can't tell you why. But somehow or other, I don't like it'

"At that moment Violet Mannering came across to me

"'I hate this place,' she cried 'I hate it. Do let's get out of it'

"We moved away and the others followed us. Only Diana

Ashley lingered. I turned my head over my shoulder and saw her standing in front of the idol house gazing earnestly at the image within it.

"The day was an unusually hot and beautiful one and Diana Ashley's suggestion of a fancy dress party that evening was received with general favour. The usual laughing and whispering and frenzied secret sewing took place and when we all made our appearance for dinner there were the usual outcries of merriment. Rogers and his wife were Neolithic hut dwellers—explaining the sudden lack of hearth-rugs. Richard Haydon called himself a Phœnician sailor, and his cousin was a Brigand Chief, Dr Symonds was a chef, Lady Mannering was a hospital nurse, and her daughter was a Circassian slave. I myself was arrayed somewhat too warmly as a monk. Diana Ashley came down last and was somewhat of a disappointment to all of us, being wrapped in a shapeless black domino.

"‘The Unknown,’ she declared airily. ‘That is what I am. Now for goodness’ sake let’s go in to dinner.’

"After dinner we went outside. It was a lovely night, warm and soft, and the moon was rising.

"We wandered about and chatted and the time passed quickly enough. It must have been an hour later when we realised that Diana Ashley was not with us.

"‘Surely she has not gone to bed,’ said Richard Haydon.

"Violet Mannering shook her head.

"‘Oh, no,’ she said. ‘I saw her going off in that direction about a quarter of an hour ago.’ She pointed as she spoke towards the grove of trees that showed black and shadowy in the moonlight.

"‘I wonder what she is up to,’ said Richard Haydon, ‘some devilment, I swear. Let’s go and see.’

"We all trooped off together, somewhat curious as to what Miss Ashley had been up to. Yet I, for one, felt a curious reluctance to enter that dark foreboding belt of trees. Something stronger than myself seemed to be holding me back and urging me not to enter. I felt more definitely convinced than ever of the essential evilness of the spot. I think that some of the others experienced the same sensations that I did, though they would have been loath to admit it. The trees were so closely planted that the moonlight could not penetrate. There were a dozen soft sounds all round us, whisperings and sighings. The feeling was eerie in the extreme, and by common consent we all kept close together.

"Suddenly we came out into the open clearing in the middle of the grove and stood rooted to the spot in amazement, for there, on the threshold of the Idol House, stood a shimmering figure

wrapped tightly round in diaphanous gauze and with two crescent horns rising from the dark masses of her hair

"'My God!' said Richard Haydon, and the sweat sprang out on his brow

"But Violet Mannering was sharper

"'Why, it's Diana,' she exclaimed 'What has she done to herself? Oh, she looks quite different somehow!'

"The figure in the doorway raised her hands. She took a step forward and chanted in a high sweet voice

"'I am the Priestess of Astarte,' she crooned 'Beware how you approach me, for I hold death in my hand'

"'Don't do it, dear,' protested Lady Mannering 'You give us the creeps, you really do'

"Haydon sprang forward towards her

"'My God, Diana!' he cried 'You are wonderful'

"My eyes were accustomed to the moonlight now and I could see more plainly. She did, indeed, as Violet had said, look quite different. Her face was more definitely oriental, and her eyes more of slits with something cruel in their gleam, and the strange smile on her lips was one that I had never seen there before

"'Beware,' she cried warningly 'Do not approach the Goddess. If any one lays a hand on me it is death'

"'You are wonderful, Diana,' cried Haydon, 'but do stop it. Somehow or other I—I don't like it'

"He was moving towards her across the grass and she flung out a hand towards him

"'Stop,' she cried 'One step nearer and I will smite you with the magic of Astarte'

"Richard Haydon laughed and quickened his pace, when all at once a curious thing happened. He hesitated for a moment, then seemed to stumble and fall headlong

"He did not get up again, but lay where he had fallen prone on the ground

"Suddenly Diana began to laugh hysterically. It was a strange horrible sound breaking the silence of the glade

"With an oath Elliot sprang forward

"'I can't stand this,' he cried, 'get up, Dick, get up, man'

"But still Richard Haydon lay where he had fallen. Elliot Haydon reached his side, knelt by him and turned him gently over. He bent over him, peering in his face

"Then he rose sharply to his feet and stood swaying a little

"'Doctor,' he said 'Doctor, for God's sake come. I—I think he is dead'

"Symonds ran forward and Elliot rejoined us walking very slowly. He was looking down at his hands in a way I didn't understand

"At that moment there was a wild scream from Diana

" 'I have killed him,' she cried 'Oh, my God! I didn't mean to, but I have killed him'

"And she fainted dead away, falling in a crumpled heap on the grass

"There was a cry from Mrs Rogers

" 'Oh, do let us get away from this dreadful place,' she wailed, 'anything might happen to us here Oh, it's awful!'

"Elliot got hold of me by the shoulder

" 'It can't be, man,' he murmured 'I tell you it can't *be* A man cannot be killed like that It is—it's against Nature'

"I tried to soothe him

" 'There is some explanation,' I said 'Your cousin must have had some unsuspected weakness of the heart The shock and excitement——'

"He interrupted me

" 'You don't understand,' he said He held up his hands for me to see and I noticed a red stain on them

" 'Dick didn't die of shock, he was stabbed—stabbed to the heart, and *there is no weapon*'

"I stared at him incredulously At that moment Symonds rose from his examination of the body and came towards us He was pale and shaking all over

" 'Are we all mad?' he said 'What is this place—that things like this can happen in it?'

" 'Then it is true,' I said

"He nodded

" 'The wound is such as would be made by a long thin dagger, but—there is no dagger there'

"We all looked at each other

" 'But it must be there,' cried Elliot Haydon 'It must have dropped out It must be on the ground somewhere Let us look'

"We peered about vainly on the ground Violet Mannering said suddenly

" 'Diana had something in her hand A kind of dagger I saw it I saw it glitter when she threatened him'

"Elliot Haydon shook his head

" 'He never even got within three yards of her,' he objected

"Lady Mannering was bending over the prostrate girl on the ground

" 'There is nothing in her hand now,' she announced, 'and I can't see anything on the ground Are you sure you saw it, Violet? I didn't'

"Dr Symonds came over to the girl

" 'We must get her to the house,' he said 'Rogers, will you help?'

"Between us we carried the unconscious girl back to the house. Then we returned and fetched the body of Sir Richard."

Dr Pender broke off apologetically and looked round. "One would know better nowadays," he said, "owing to the prevalence of detective fiction. Every street boy knows that a body must be left where it is found. But in these days we had not the same knowledge, and accordingly we carried the body of Richard Haydon back to his bedroom in the square granite house and the butler was despatched on a bicycle in search of the police—a ride of some twelve miles."

"It was then that Elliot Haydon drew me aside."

"'Look here,' he said. 'I am going back to the grove. That weapon has got to be found.'"

"'If there was a weapon,' I said doubtfully."

"He seized my arm and shook it fiercely. 'You have got that superstitious stuff into your head. You think his death was supernatural, well, I am going back to the grove to find out.'"

"I was curiously averse to his doing so. I did my utmost to dissuade him, but without result. The mere idea of that thick circle of trees was abhorrent to me and I felt a strong premonition of further disaster. But Elliot was entirely pig-headed. He was, I think, scared himself, but would not admit it. He went off fully armed with determination to get to the bottom of the mystery."

"It was a very dreadful night, none of us could sleep, or attempt to do so. The police, when they arrived, were frankly incredulous of the whole thing. They evinced a strong desire to cross-examine Miss Ashley, but there they had to reckon with Dr Symonds, who opposed the idea vehemently. Miss Ashley had come out of her faint or trance and he had given her a strong sleeping draught. She was on no account to be disturbed until the following day."

"It was not until about seven o'clock in the morning that any one thought about Elliot Haydon, and then Symonds suddenly asked where he was. I explained what Elliot had done and Symonds' grave face grew a shade graver. 'I wish he hadn't. It is—it is foolhardy,' he said."

"'You don't think any harm can have happened to him?'"

"'I hope not. I think, Padre, that you and I had better go and see.'"

"I knew he was right, but it took all the courage in my command to nerve myself for the task. We set out together and entered once more that ill-fated grove of trees. We called him twice and got no reply. In a minute or two we came into the clearing, which looked pale and ghostly in the early morning light. Symonds clutched my arm and I uttered a muttered exclamation. Last night when we had seen it in the moonlight there had been the body of a man lying face downwards on the grass. Now

in the early morning light the same sight met our eyes Elliot Haydon was lying on the exact spot where his cousin had been

"'My God!' said Symonds *'It has got him too!'*

"We ran together over the grass Elliot Haydon was unconscious but breathing feebly and this time there was no doubt of what had caused the tragedy A long thin bronze weapon remained in the wound

"'Got him through the shoulder, not through the heart That is lucky,' commented the doctor 'On my soul, I don't know what to think At any rate he is not dead and he will be able to tell us what happened'

"But that was just what Elliot Haydon was not able to do His description was vague in the extreme He had hunted about vainly for the dagger and at last giving up the search had taken up a stand near the Idol House It was then that he became increasingly certain that some one was watching him from the belt of trees He fought against this impression but was not able to shake it off He described a cold strange wind that began to blow It seemed to come not from the trees but from the interior of the Idol House He turned round, peering inside it He saw the small figure of the Goddess and he felt he was under an optical illusion The figure seemed to grow larger and larger Then he suddenly received something that felt like a blow between his temples which sent him reeling back, and as he fell he was conscious of a sharp burning pain in his left shoulder

"The dagger was identified this time as being the identical one which had been dug up in the barrow on the hill, and which had been bought by Richard Haydon Where he had kept it, in the house or in the Idol House in the grove, none seemed to know

"The police were of the opinion, and always will be, that he was deliberately stabbed by Miss Ashley, but in view of our combined evidence that she was never within three yards of him, they could not hope to support the charge against her So the thing has been and remains a mystery"

There was a silence

"There doesn't seem anything to say," said Joyce Lemprière at length "It is all so horrible—and uncanny Have you no explanation yourself, Dr Pender?"

The old man nodded "Yes," he said "I have an explanation—a kind of explanation, that is Rather a curious one—but to my mind it still leaves certain factors unaccounted for"

"I have been to séances," said Joyce, "and you may say what you like, very queer things can happen I suppose one can explain it by some kind of hypnotism The girl really turned herself into a Priestess of Astarte, and I suppose somehow or other she must

have stabbed him. Perhaps she threw the dagger that Miss Mannerling saw in her hand."

"Or it might have been a javelin," suggested Raymond West. "After all, moonlight is not very strong. She might have had a kind of spear in her hand and stabbed him at a distance, and then I suppose mass hypnotism comes into account. I mean you were all prepared to see him stricken down by supernatural means and so you saw it like that."

"I have seen many wonderful things done with weapons and knives at music halls," said Sir Henry. "I suppose it is possible that a man could have been concealed in the belt of trees, and that he might from there have thrown a knife or a dagger with sufficient accuracy—agreeing, of course, that he was a professional. I admit that that seems rather far-fetched, but it seems the only really feasible theory. You remember that the other man was distinctly under the impression that there was some one in the grove of trees watching him. As to Miss Mannerling saying that Miss Ashley had a dagger in her hand and the others saying she hadn't, that doesn't surprise me. If you had had my experience you would know that five persons' account of the same thing will differ so widely as to be almost incredible."

Mr Petherick coughed.

"But in all these theories we seem to be overlooking one essential fact," he remarked. "What became of the weapon? Miss Ashley could hardly get rid of a javelin standing as she was in the middle of an open space, and if a hidden murderer had thrown a dagger, then the dagger would still have been in the wound when the man was turned over. We must, I think, discard all far-fetched theories and confine ourselves to sober fact."

"And where does sober fact lead us?"

"Well, one thing seems quite clear. No one was near the man when he was stricken down, so the only person who *could* have stabbed him was he himself. Suicide, in fact."

"But why on earth should he wish to commit suicide?" asked Raymond West incredulously.

The lawyer coughed again. "Ah, that is a question of theory once more," he said. "At the moment I am not concerned with theories. It seems to me, excluding the supernatural in which I do not for one moment believe, that that was the only way things could have happened. He stabbed himself, and as he fell his arms flew out, wrenching the dagger from the wound and flinging it far into the zone of the trees. That is, I think, although somewhat unlikely, a possible happening."

"I don't like to say, I am sure," said Miss Marple. "It all perplexes me very much indeed. But curious things do happen. At Lady Sharpley's garden party last year the man who was arrang-

ing the clock golf tripped over one of the numbers—quite unconscious he was—and didn't come round for about five minutes."

"Yes, dear Aunt," said Raymond gently, "but he wasn't stabbed, was he?"

"Of course not dear," said Miss Marple "That is what I am telling you Of course there is only one way that poor Sir Richard could have been stabbed, but I do wish I knew what caused him to stumble in the first place Of course, it might have been a tree root He would be looking at the girl, of course, and when it is moonlight one does trip over things"

"You say that there is only one way that Sir Richard could have been stabbed, Miss Marple," said the clergyman, looking at her curiously

"It is very sad and I don't like to think of it He was a right-handed man, was he not? I mean to stab himself in the left shoulder he must have been I was always so sorry for poor Jack Baynes in the War He shot himself in the foot, you remember, after very severe fighting at Arras He told me about it when I went to see him in hospital, and very ashamed of it he was I don't expect this poor man, Elliot Haydon, profited much by his wicked crime"

"Elliot Haydon," cried Raymond "You think he did it?"

"I don't see how any one else could have done it," said Miss Marple, opening her eyes in gentle surprise "I mean if, as Mr Petherick so wisely says, one looks at the facts and disregards all that atmosphere of heathen goddesses which I don't think is very nice He went up to him first and turned him over, and of course to do that he would have to have had his back to them all, and being dressed as a brigand chief he would be sure to have a weapon of some kind in his belt I remember dancing with a man dressed as a brigand chief when I was a young girl He had five kinds of knives and daggers, and I can't tell you how awkward and uncomfortable it was for his partner"

All eyes were turned towards Dr Pender

"I knew the truth," said he, "five years after that tragedy occurred It came in the shape of a letter written to me by Elliot Haydon He said in it that he fancied that I had always suspected him He said it was a sudden temptation He too loved Diana Ashley, but he was only a poor struggling barrister With Richard out of the way and inheriting his title and estates, he saw a wonderful prospect opening up before him The dagger had jerked out of his belt as he knelt down by his cousin, and almost before he had time to think, he drove it in and returned it to his belt again He stabbed himself later in order to divert suspicion He wrote to me on the eve of starting on an expedition to the

South Pole in case, as he said, he should never come back. I do not think that he meant to come back, and I know, that, as Miss Marple has said, his crime profited him nothing. 'For five years,' he wrote, 'I have lived in Hell. I hope, at least, that I may expiate my crime by dying honourably.'"

There was a pause.

"And he did die honourably," said Sir Henry. "You have changed the names in your story, Dr. Pender, but I think I recognise the man you mean."

"As I said," went on the old clergyman, "I do not think that explanation quite covers the facts. I still think there was an evil influence in that grove, an influence that directed Elliot Haydon's action. Even to this day I can never think without a shudder of The Idol House of Astarte."

Prince Zaleski

THE STONE OF THE EDMUNDSBURY MONKS

By

M P SHIEL

"RUSSIA," said Prince Zaleski to me one day, when I happened to be on a visit to him in his darksome sanctuary—"Russia may be regarded as land surrounded by ocean, that is to say, she is an island. In the same way, it is sheer gross irrelevancy to speak of *Britain* as an island, unless indeed the word be understood as a mere *modus loquendi* arising out of a rather poor geographical pleasantry. Britain, in reality, is a small continent. Near her—a little to the south-east—is situated the large island of Europe. Thus, the enlightened French traveller passing to these shores should commune within himself 'I now cross to the Mainland', and retracing his steps 'I now return to the fragment rent by wrack and earthshock from the Mother-country'. And this I say not in the way of paradox, but as the expression of a sober truth. I have in my mind merely the relative depth and extent—the *non-insularity*, in fact—of the impressions made by the several nations on the world. But this island of Europe has herself an island of her own. the name of it, Russia. She, of all lands, is the *terra incognita*, the unknown land, till quite lately she was more—she was the undiscovered, the unsuspected land. She *has* a literature, you know, and a history, and a language, and a purpose—but of all this the world has hardly so much as heard. Indeed, she, and not any Antarctic Sea whatever, is the real Ultima Thule of modern times, the true Island of Mystery."

I reproduce these remarks of Zaleski here, not so much on account of the splendid tribute to my country contained in them, as because it ever seemed to me—and especially in connection with the incident I am about to recall—that in this respect at least he was a genuine son of Russia, if she is the Land, so truly was he the Man, of Mystery. I who knew him best alone knew that it was impossible to know him. He was being little of the present with one arm he embraced the whole past, the fingers of the other heaved on the vibrant pulse of the future. He seemed to me—I say it deliberately and with forethought—to possess the unparalleled

power not merely of disentangling in retrospect, but of unravelling in prospect, and I have known him to relate *coming* events with unimaginable minuteness of precision. He was nothing if not superlative—his diatribes, 'now culminating in a very *extravangaza* of hyperbole—now sailing with loose wing through the downy, witched, Dutch cloud-heaps of some quaintest tramontane Nephelococcugia of thought—now laying down law of the Medes for the actual world of to-day—had oft-times the strange effect of bringing back to my mind the very singular old-epic epithet, *ηνεγκεν*—*airy*—as applied to human thought. The mere grip of his memory was not simply extraordinary, it had in it a token, a hint, of the strange, the pythic—nay, the sibylline. And as his reflecting intellect, moreover, had all the lightness of foot of a chamois kid, unless you could contrive to follow each dizzily swift successive step, by the sum of which he attained his Alp-heights, he inevitably left on you the astounding, the confounding impression of mental omnipresence.

I had brought with me a certain document, a massive book bound in iron and leather, the diary of one Sir Jocelin Saul. This I had abstracted from a gentleman of my acquaintance, the head of a firm of inquiry agents in London, into whose hand, only the day before, it had come. A distant neighbour of Sir Jocelin, hearing by chance of his extremity, had invoked the assistance of this firm, but the aged baronet, being in a state of the utmost feebleness, terror, and indeed hysterical incoherence, had been able to utter no word in explanation of his condition or wishes, and, in silent abandonment, had merely handed the book to the agent.

A day or two after I had reached the desolate old mansion which the prince occupied, knowing that he might sometimes be induced to take an absorbing interest in questions that had proved themselves too profound, or too intricate, for ordinary solution, I asked him if he was willing to hear the details read out from the diary, and on his assenting, I proceeded to do so.

The brief narrative had reference to a very large and very valuable oval gem enclosed in the substance of a golden chalice, which chalice, in the monastery of St Edmundsbury, had once lain centuries long within the Loculus, or inmost coffin, wherein reposed the body of St Edmund. By pressing a hidden pivot, the cup (which was composed of two equal parts, connected by minute hinges) spring open, and in a hollow space at the bottom was disclosed the gem. Sir Jocelin Saul, I may say, was lineally connected with—though, of course, not descendant from—that same Jocelin of Brakelonda, a brother of the Edmundsbury convent who wrote the now so celebrated *Jocelina Chronica*—and the chalice had fallen into the possession of the family, seemingly at some time

prior to the suppression of the monastery about 1537. On it was inscribed in old English characters of unknown date the words

'Shulde this Ston stalen bee,
Or shuld it chaunges dre,
The Houss of Sawl and hys Hed anoon shal de'

The stone itself was an intaglio, and had engraved on its surface the figure of a mythological animal, together with some nearly obliterated letters, of which the only ones remaining legible were those forming the word "Has." As a sure precaution against the loss of the gem, another cup had been made and engraved in an exactly similar manner, inside of which, to complete the delusion, another stone of the same size and cut, but of comparatively valueless material, had been placed.

Sir Jocelin Saul, a man of intense nervousity, lived his life alone in a remote old manor-house in Suffolk, his only companion being a person of Eastern origin, named Ul-Jabal. The baronet had consumed his vitality in the life-long attempt to sound the too fervid Maelstrom of Oriental research, and his mind had perhaps caught from his studies a tinge of their morbidness, their esotericism, their insanity. He had for some years past been engaged in the task of writing a stupendous work on Pre-Zoroastrian Theogonies, in which, it is to be supposed, Ul-Jabal acted somewhat in the capacity of secretary. But I will give *verbatim* the extracts from his diary.

"June 11.—This is my birthday. Seventy years ago exactly I slid from the belly of the great Dark into this Light and Life. My God! My God! it is briefer than the rage of an hour, fleeter than a midday trance. Ul-Jabal greeted me warmly—seemed to have been looking forward to it—and pointed out that seventy is of the fateful numbers, its only factors being seven, five, and two—the last denoting the duality of Birth and Death, five, Isolation, seven, Infinity. I informed him that this was also my father's birthday, and *his* father's; and repeated the oft-told tale of how the latter, just seventy years ago to-day, walking at twilight by the churchyard-wall, saw the figure of *himself* sitting on a grave-stone, and died five weeks later riving with the pangs of hell. Whereat the sceptic showed his two huge rows of teeth.

"What is his peculiar interest in the Edmundsbury chalice? On each successive birthday when the cup has been produced, he has asked me to show him the stone. Without any well-defined reason I have always declined, but to-day I yielded. He gazed long into its sky-blue depth, and then asked if I had no idea what the inscription 'Has' meant. I informed him that it was one of the lost secrets of the world.

"June 15.—Some new element has entered into our existence

here Something threatens me I hear the echo of a menace against my sanity and my life It is as if the garment which enwraps me has grown too hot, too heavy for me A notable drowsiness has settled on my brain—a drowsiness in which thought, though slow, is a thousandfold more fiery-vivid than ever Oh, fair goddess of Reason, desert not me, thy chosen child!

“June 18—Ul-Jabal?—that man is *the very Devil incarnate!*”

“June 19—So much for my bounty, all my munificence, to this poisonous worm I picked him up on the heights of the Mountain of Lebanon, a cultured savage among cultured savages, and brought him here to be a prince of thought by my side What though his plundered wealth—the debt I owe him—has saved me from a sort of ruin? Have not *I* instructed him in the sweet secret of Reason?

“I lay back on my bed in the lonely morning watches, my soul heavy as with the distilled essence of opiates, and in vivid vision knew that he had entered my apartment In the twilight gloom his glittering rows of shark’s teeth seemed impacted on my eyeball—I saw *them*, and nothing else I was not aware when he vanished from the room But at daybreak I crawled on hands and knees to the cabinet containing the chalice The viperous murderer! He has stolen my gem, well knowing that with it he has stolen my life The stone is gone—gone, my precious gem A weakness overtook me, and I lay for many dreamless hours naked on the marble floor

“Does the fool think to hide ought from my eyes? Can he imagine that I shall not recover my precious gem, my stone of Saul?

“June 20—Ah, Ul-Jabal—my brave, my noble Son of the Prophet of God! He has replaced the stone! He would not slay an aged man The yellow ray of his eye, it is but the gleam of the great thinker, not—not—the gleam of the assassin Again, as I lay in semi-somnolence, I saw him enter my room, this time more distinctly He went up to the cabinet Shaking the chalice in the dawning, some hours after he had left, I heard with delight the rattle of the stone I might have known he would replace it, I should not have doubted his clemency to a poor man like me But the strange being!—he has taken the *other* stone from the *other* cup—a thing of little value to any man! Is Ul-Jabal mad or I?

“June 21—Merciful Lord in Heaven! he has *not* replaced it—not *it*—but another instead of it To-day I actually opened the chalice, and saw He has put a stone there, the same in size, in cut, in engraving, but different in colour, in quality, in value—a stone I have never seen before How has he obtained it—whence? I must brace myself to probe, to watch, I must turn myself into an eye to search this devil’s-bosom My life, this subtle, cunning Reason of mine, hangs in the balance

“*June 22*—Just now he offered me a cup of wine I almost dashed it to the ground before him But he looked steadfastly into my eye I flinched and drank—drank

“Years ago, when, as I remember, we were at Balbec, I saw him one day make an almost tasteless preparation out of pure black nicotine, which in mere wanton lust he afterwards gave to some of the dwellers by the Caspian to drink But the fiend would surely never dream of giving to me that browse of hell—to me an aged man, and a thinker, a seer

“*June 23*—The mysterious, the unfathomable Ul-Jabal! Once again, as I lay in heavy trance at midnight, has he invaded, calm and noiseless as a spirit, the sanctity of my chamber Serene on the swaying air, which, radiant with soft beams of vermil and violet light, rocked me into variant visions of heaven, I reclined and regarded him unmoved The man has replaced the valueless stone in the modern-made chalice, and has now stolen the false stone from the other, which *he himself* put there! In patience will I possess this my soul, and watch what shall betide My eyes shall know no slumber!

“*June 24*—No more—no more shall I drink wine from the hand of Ul-Jabal My knees totter beneath the weight of my lean body Daggers of lambent fever race through my brain incessant Some fibrillary twitchings at the right angle of the mouth have also arrested my attention

“*June 25*—He has dared at open midday to enter my room I watched him from an angle of the stairs pass along the corridor and open my door But for the terrifying, death-boding thump, thump of my heart, I should have faced the traitor then, and told him that I knew all his treachery Did I say that I had strange fibrillary twitchings at the right angle of my mouth, and a brain on fire? I have ceased to write my book—the more the pity for the world, not for me

“*June 26*—Marvellous to tell, the traitor, Ul-Jabal, has now placed *another* stone in the Edmundsbury chalice—also identical in nearly every respect with the original gem This, then, was the object of his entry into my room yesterday So that he has first stolen the real stone and replaced it by another, then he has stolen this other and replaced it by yet another, he has beside stolen the valueless stone from the modern chalice, and then replaced it Surely a man gone rabid, a man gone dancing, foaming, raving mad!

“*June 28*—I have now set myself to the task of recovering my jewel It is here, and I shall find it Life against life—and which is the best life, mine or this accursed Ishmaelite’s? If need be, I will do murder—I, with this withered hand—so that I get back the heritage which is mine

"To-day, when I thought he was wandering in the park, I stole into his room, locking the door on the inside I trembled exceedingly, knowing that his eyes are in every place I ransacked the chamber, dived among his clothes, but found no stone One singular thing in a drawer I saw a long, white beard, and a wig of long and snow-white hair As I passed out of the chamber, lo, he stood face to face with me at the door in the passage My heart gave one bound, and then seemed wholly to cease its travail Oh, I must be sick unto death, weaker than a bruised reed! When I woke from my swoon he was supporting me in his arms 'Now,' he said, grinning down at me, 'now you have at last delivered all into my hands' He left me, and I saw him go into his room and lock the door upon himself What is it I have delivered into the madman's hands?

"*July 1*—Life against life—and his, the young, the stalwart, rather than mine, the mouldering, the sere I love life Not yet am I ready to weigh anchor, and reeve halliard, and turn my prow over the watery paths of the wine-brown Deeps Oh no Not yet Let *him* die Many and many are the days in which I shall yet see the light, walk, think I am averse to end the number of my years there is even a feeling in me at times that this worn body shall never, never taste of death The chalice predicts indeed that I and my house shall end when the stone is lost—a mere fiction *at first*, an idler's dream *then*, but now—now—that the prophecy has stood so long a part of the reality of things, and a fact among facts—no longer fiction, but Adamant, stern as the very word of God Do I not feel hourly since it has gone how the surges of life ebb, ebb ever lower in my heart? Nay, nay, but there is hope I have here beside me an Arab blade of subtle Damascene steel, insinuous to pierce and to hew, with which in a street of Bethlehem I saw a Syrian's head cleft open—a gallant stroke! The edges of this I have made bright and white for a nuptial of blood

"*July 2*—I spent the whole of the last night in searching every nook and crack of the house, using a powerful magnifying lens At times I thought Ul-Jabal was watching me, and would pounce out and murder me Convulsive tremors shook my frame like earthquake Ah me, I fear I am all too frail for this work Yet dear is the love of life

"*July 7*—The last days I have passed in carefully searching the grounds, with the lens as before Ul-Jabal constantly found pretexts for following me, and I am confident that every step I took was known to him No sign anywhere of the grass having been disturbed Yet my lands are wide, and I cannot be sure The burden of this mighty task is greater than I can bear I am weaker than a bruised reed Shall I not slay my enemy, and make an end?

"*July 8*—Ul-Jabal has been in my chamber again! I watched

him through a crack in the panelling. His form was hidden by the bed, but I could see his hand reflected in the great mirror opposite the door. First, I cannot guess why, he moved to a point in front of the mirror the chair in which I sometimes sit. He then went to the box in which lie my few garments—and opened it. Ah, I have the stone—safe—safe! He fears my cunning, ancient eyes, and has hidden it in the one place where I would be least likely to seek it—in *my own trunk!* And yet I dread, most intensely I dread, to look

“*July 9*—The stone, alas, is not there! At the last moment he must have changed his purpose. Could his wondrous sensitiveness of intuition have made him feel that my eyes were looking in on him?

“*July 10*—In the dead of night I knew that a stealthy foot had gone past my door. I rose and threw a mantle round me, I put on my head my cap of fur, I took the tempered blade in my hands, then crept out into the dark, and followed. Ul-Jabal carried a small lantern which revealed him to me. My feet were bare, but he wore felted slippers, which to my unfailing ear were not utterly noiseless. He descended the stairs to the bottom of the house, while I crouched behind him in the deepest gloom of the corners and walls. At the bottom he walked into the pantry, there stopped, and turned the lantern full in the direction of the spot where I stood, but so agilely did I slide behind a pillar, that he could not have seen me. In the pantry he lifted the trap-door, and descended still further into the vaults beneath the house. Ah, the vaults,—the long, the tortuous, the darksome vaults,—how had I forgotten them? Still I followed, rent by seismic shocks of terror. I had not forgotten the weapon—could I creep near enough, I felt that I might plunge it into the marrow of his back. He opened the iron door of the first vault and passed in. If I could lock him in?—but he held the key. On and on he wound his way, holding the lantern near the ground, his head bent down. The thought came to me *then*, that, had I but the courage, one swift sweep, and all were over. I crept closer, closer. Suddenly he turned round, and made a quick step in my direction. I saw his eyes, the murderous grin of his jaw. I know not if he saw me—thought forsook me. The weapon fell with clatter and clangor from my grasp, and in panic fright I fled with extended arms and the headlong swiftness of a stripling, through the black labyrinths of the caverns, through the vacant corridors of the house, till I reached my chamber, the door of which I had time to fasten on myself before I dropped, gasping, panting for very life, on the floor.

“*July 11*—I had not the courage to see Ul-Jabal to-day. I have remained locked in my chamber all the time without food or water. My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth.

"*July 12*—I took heart and crept downstairs. I met him in the study. He smiled on me, and I on him, as if nothing had happened between us. Oh, our old friendship, how it has turned into bitterest hate! I had taken the false stone from the Edmundsbury chalice and put it in the pocket of my brown gown, with the bold intention of showing it to him, and asking him if he knew aught of it. But when I faced him, my courage failed again. We drank together and ate together as in the old days of love.

"*July 13*—I cannot think that I have not again imbibed some soporiferous drug. A great heaviness of sleep weighed on my brain till late in the day. When I woke my thoughts were in wild distraction, and a most peculiar condition of my skin held me fixed before the mirror. It is dry as parchment, and brown as the leaves of autumn.

"*July 14*—Ul-Jabal is gone! And I am left a lonely, a desolate old man! He said, though I swore it was false, that I had grown to mistrust him! that I was hiding something from him! that he could live with me no more! No more, he said, should I see his face! The debt I owe him he would forgive. He has taken one small parcel with him,—and is gone!

"*July 15*—Gone! gone! In mazeful dream I wander with uncovered head far and wide over my domain, seeking I know not what. The stone he has with him—the precious stone of Saul. I feel the life-surge ebbing, ebbing in my heart."

Here the manuscript abruptly ended.

Prince Zaleski had listened as I read aloud, lying back on his Moorish couch and breathing slowly from his lips a heavy reddish vapour, which he imbibed from a very small, carved, bismuth pipette. His face, as far as I could see in the green-grey crepuscular atmosphere of the apartment, was expressionless. But when I had finished he turned fully round on me, and said

"You perceive, I hope, the sinister meaning of all this?"

"Has it a meaning?"

Zaleski smiled.

"Can you doubt it? in the shape of a cloud, the pitch of a thrush's note, the *nuance* of a sea-shell you would find, had you only insight *enough*, inductive and deductive cunning *enough*, not only a meaning, but, I am convinced, a quite endless significance. Undoubtedly, in a human document of this kind, there is a meaning, and I may say at once that this meaning is entirely transparent to me. Pity only that you did not read the diary to me before."

"Why?"

"Because we might, between us, have prevented a crime, and saved a life. The last entry in the diary was made on the 15th of July. What day is this?"

"This is the 20th."

"Then I would wager a thousand to one that we are too late. There is still, however, the one chance left. The time is now seven o'clock—seven of the evening, I think, not of the morning, the houses of business in London are therefore closed. But why not send my man, Ham, with a letter by train to the private address of the person from whom you obtained the diary, telling him to hasten immediately to Sir Jocelin Saul, and on no consideration to leave his side for a moment? Ham would reach this person before midnight, and understanding that the matter was one of life and death, he would assuredly do your bidding."

As I was writing the note suggested by Zaleski, I turned and asked him

"From whom shall I say that the danger is to be expected—from the Indian?"

"From Ul-Jabal, yes, but by no means Indian—Persian."

Profoundly impressed by this knowledge of detail derived from sources which had brought me no intelligence, I handed the note to the negro, telling him how to proceed, and instructing him before starting from the station to search all the procurable papers of the last few days, and to return in case he found in any of them a notice of the death of Sir Jocelin Saul. Then I resumed my seat by the side of Zaleski.

"As I have told you," he said, "I am fully convinced that our messenger has gone on a bootless errand. I believe you will find that what has really occurred is this—either yesterday, or the day before, Sir Jocelin was found by his servant—I imagine he had a servant, though no mention is made of any—lying on the marble floor of his chamber, dead. Near him, probably by his side, will be found a gem—an oval stone, white in colour—the same in fact which Ul-Jabal last placed in the Edmundsbury chalice. There will be no marks of violence—no trace of poison—the death will be found to be a perfectly natural one. Yet, in this case, a particularly wicked murder has been committed. There are, I assure you, to my positive knowledge forty-three—and in one island in the South Seas, forty-four—different methods of doing murder, any one of which would be entirely beyond the scope of the introspective agencies at the ordinary disposal of society."

"But let us bend our minds to the details of this matter. Let us ask first, *who* is this Ul-Jabal? I have said that he is a Persian, and of this there is abundant evidence in the narrative other than his mere name. Fragmentary as the document is, and not intended by the writer to afford the information, there is yet evidence of the religion of this man, of the particular sect of that religion to which he belonged, of his peculiar shade of colour, of the object of his stay at the manor-house of Saul, of the special tribe amongst whom he formerly lived. 'What,' he asks, when his greedy eyes

first light on the long-desired gem, 'what is the meaning of the inscription 'Has'—the meaning which *he* so well knew 'One of the lost secrets of the world,' replies the baronet But I can hardly understand a learned Orientalist speaking in that way about what appears to me a very patent circumstance it is clear that he never earnestly applied himself to the solution of the riddle, or else—what is more likely, in spite of his rather high-flown estimate of his own 'Reason'—that his mind, and the mind of his ancestors, never was able to go farther back in time than the Edmundsbury Monks But *they* did not make the stone, nor did they dig it from the depths of the earth in Suffolk—they got it from some one, and it is not difficult to say with certainty from whom The stone, then, might have been engraved by that some one, or by the some one from whom *he* received it, and so on back into the dimnesses of time And consider the character of the engraving—it consists of a *mythological animal*, and some words, of which the letters 'Has' only are distinguishable But the animal, at least, is pure Persian The Persians, you know, were not only quite worthy competitors with the Hebrews, the Egyptians, and later on the Greeks, for excellence in the glyptic art, but this fact is remarkable, that in much the same way that the figure of the *scarabæus* on an intaglio or cameo is a pretty infallible indication of an Egyptian hand, so is that of a priest or a grotesque animal a sure indication of a Persian We may say, then, from that evidence alone—though there is more—that this gem was certainly Persian And having reached that point, the mystery of 'Has' vanishes for we at once jump at the conclusion that that too is Persian But Persian, you say, written in English characters? Yes, and it was precisely this fact that made its meaning one of what the baronet childishly calls 'the lost secrets of the world' for every successive inquirer, believing it part of an English phrase, was thus hopelessly led astray in his investigation 'Has' is, in fact, part of the word 'Hasn-us-Sabah,' and the mere circumstance that some of it has been obliterated, while the figure of the mystic animal remains intact, shows that it was executed by one of a nation less skilled in the art of graving in precious stones than the Persians—by a rude, mediæval Englishman, in short,—the modern revival of the art owing its origin, of course, to the Medici of a later age And of this Englishman—who either graved the stone himself, or got some one else to do it for him—do we know nothing? We know, at least, that he was certainly a fighter, probably a Norman baron, that on his arm he bore the cross of red, that he trod the sacred soil of Palestine Perhaps, to prove this, I need hardly remind you who Hasn-us-Sabah was It is enough if I say that he was greatly mixed up in the affairs of the Crusaders, lending his irresistible arms now to this side, now to that He was the chief

of the heterodox Mohammedan sect of the Assassins (this word, I believe, is actually derived from his name), imagined himself to be an incarnation of the Deity, and from his inaccessible rock-fortress of Alamut in the Elburz exercised a sinister influence on the intricate politics of the day. The Red Cross Knights called him Shaikh-ul-Jabal—the Old Man of the Mountains, that very nickname connecting him infallibly with the Ul-Jabal of our own times. Now three well-known facts occur to me in connection with this stone of the House of Saul: the first, that Saladin met in battle, and defeated, *and plundered*, in a certain place, on a certain day, this Hasn-us-Sabah, or one of his successors bearing the same name, the second, that about this time there was a cordial *rapprochement* between Saladin and Richard the Lion, and between the Infidels and the Christians generally, during which a free interchange of gems, then regarded as of deep mystic importance, took place—remember ‘The Talisman,’ and the ‘Lee Penny’, the third, that soon after the fighters of Richard, and then himself, returned to England, the Loculus or coffin of St Edmund (as we are informed by the *Jocelin Chronica*) was *opened by the Abbot* at midnight, and the body of the martyr exposed. On such occasions it was customary to place gems and relics in the coffin, when it was again closed up. Now, the chalice with the stone was taken from this loculus, and is it possible not to believe that some knight, to whom it had been presented by one of Saladin’s men, had in turn presented it to the monastery, first scratching uncouthly on its surface the name of Hasn to mark its semi-sacred origin, or perhaps bidding the monks to do so? But the Assassins, now called, I think, ‘al Hasanî’ or ‘Ismailî’—‘that accursed *Ishmaelite*,’ the baronet exclaims in one place—still live, are still a flourishing sect impelled by fervid religious fanaticisms. And where think you is their chief place of settlement? Where, but on the heights of that same ‘Lebanon’ on which Sir Jocelin ‘picked up’ his too doubtful scribe and literary helper?

“It now becomes evident that Ul-Jabal was one of the sect of the Assassins, and that the object of his sojourn at the manor-house, of his financial help to the baronet, of his whole journey perhaps to England, was the recovery of the sacred gem which once glittered on the breast of the founder of his sect. In dread of spoiling all by over-rashness, he waits, perhaps for years, till he makes sure that the stone is the right one by seeing it with his own eyes, and learns the secret of the spring by which the chalice is opened. He then proceeds to steal it. So far all is clear enough. Now, this too is conceivable, that, intending to commit the theft, he had beforehand provided himself with another stone similar in size and shape—these being well known to him—to the other, in order to substitute it for the real stone, and so, for a time at least, escape detection. It

is presumable that the chalice was not often *opened* by the baronet, and this would therefore have been a perfectly rational device on the part of Ul-Jabal. But assuming this to be his mode of thinking, how ludicrously absurd appears all the trouble he took to *engrave* the false stone in an exactly similar manner to the other. That could not help him in producing the deception, for that he did not contemplate the stone being *seen*, but only *heard* in the cup, is proved by the fact that he selected a stone of a different *colour*. This colour, as I shall afterwards show you, was that of a pale, brown-spotted stone. But we are met with something more extraordinary still when we come to the last stone, the white one—I shall prove that it was white—which Ul-Jabal placed in the cup. Is it possible that he had provided *two* substitutes, and that he had engraved these *two*, without object, in the same minutely careful manner? Your mind refuses to conceive it, and *having* done this declines, in addition, to believe that he had prepared even one substitute, and I am fully in accord with you in this conclusion.

“We may say then that Ul-Jabal had not *prepared* any substitute, and it may be added that it was a thing altogether beyond the limits of the probable that he could *by chance* have possessed two old gems exactly similar in every detail down to the very half-obliterated letters of the word ‘Hasn-us-Sabah.’ I have now shown, you perceive, that he did not make them purposely, and that he did not possess them accidentally. Nor were they the baronet’s, for we have his declaration that he had never seen them before. Whence then did the Persian obtain them? That point will immediately emerge into clearness, when we have sounded his motive for replacing the one false stone by the other, and, above all, for taking away the valueless stone, and then replacing it. And in order to lead you up to the comprehension of this motive, I begin by making the bold assertion that Ul-Jabal had not in his possession the real St Edmundsbury stone at all.

“You are surprised, for you argue that if we are to take the baronet’s evidence at all, we must take it in this particular also, and he positively asserts that he saw the Persian take the stone. It is true that there are indubitable signs of insanity in the document, but it is the insanity of a diseased mind manifesting itself by fantastic exaggeration of sentiment, rather than of a mind confiding to itself its own delusions as to matters of fact. There is therefore nothing so certain as that Ul-Jabal did steal the gem, but these two things are equally evident: that by some means or other it very soon passed out of his possession, and that when it had so passed, he, for his part, believed it to be in the possession of the baronet. ‘Now,’ he cries in triumph, one day as he catches Sir Jocelin in his room—‘*now* you have delivered all into my hands.’ ‘All’ what, Sir Jocelin wonders. ‘All,’ of course, meant the stone. He

believes that the baronet has done precisely what the baronet afterwards believes that *he* has done—hidden away the stone in the most secret of all places, in his own apartment, to wit The Persian, sure now at last of victory, accordingly hastens into his chamber, and ‘locks the door,’ in order, by an easy search, to secure his prize. When, moreover, the baronet is examining the house at night with his lens, he believes that Ul-Jabal is spying his movements, when he extends his operations to the park, the other finds pretexts to be near him. Ul-Jabal dogs his footsteps like a shadow. But supposing he had really had the jewel, and had deposited it in a place of perfect safety—such as, with or without lenses, the extensive grounds of the manor-house would certainly have afforded—his more reasonable *rôle* would have been that of unconscious *nonchalance*, rather than of agonised interest. But, in fact, he supposed the owner of the stone to be himself seeking a secure hiding-place for it, and is resolved at all costs on knowing the secret. And again in the vaults beneath the house Sir Jocelin reports that Ul-Jabal ‘holds the lantern near the ground, with his head bent down’—can anything be better descriptive of the attitude of *search*? Yet each is so sure that the other possesses the gem, that neither is able to suspect that both are seekers.

“But, after all, there is far better evidence of the non-possession of the stone by the Persian than all this—and that is the murder of the baronet, for I can almost promise you that our messenger will return in a few minutes. Now, it seems to me that Ul-Jabal was not really murderous, averse rather to murder, thus the baronet is often in his power, swoons in his arms, lies under the influence of narcotics in semi-sleep while the Persian is in his room, and yet no injury is done him. Still, when the clear necessity to murder—the clear means of gaining the stone—presents itself to Ul-Jabal, he does not hesitate a moment—indeed, he has already made elaborate preparations for that very necessity. And when was it that this necessity presented itself? It was when the baronet put the false stone in the pocket of a loose gown for the purpose of confronting the Persian with it. But what kind of pocket? I think you will agree with me, that male garments, admitting of the designation ‘gown,’ have usually only outer pockets—large, square pockets, simply sewed on to the outside of the robe. But a stone of that size *must* have made such a pocket bulge outwards. Ul-Jabal must have noticed it. Never before has he been perfectly sure that the baronet carried the long-desired gem about on his body, but now at last he knows beyond all doubt. To obtain it, there are several courses open to him—he may rush there and then on the weak old man and tear the stone from him, he may ply him with narcotics, and extract it from the pocket during sleep. But in these there is a small chance of failure, there is a certainty of near or

ultimate detection, pursuit—and this is a land of Law, swift and fairly sure No, the old man must die only thus—thus surely, and thus secretly—can the outraged dignity of Hasn-us-Sabah be appeased On the very next day he leaves the house—no more shall the mistrustful baronet, who is ‘hiding something from him,’ see his face He carries with him a small parcel Let me tell you what was in that parcel it contained the baronet’s fur cap, one of his ‘brown gowns,’ and a snow-white beard and wig Of the cap we can be sure, for from the fact that, on leaving his room at midnight to follow the Persian through the *house*, he put it on his head, I gather that he wore it habitually during all his waking hours, yet after Ul-Jabal has left him he wanders *far and wide* ‘with uncovered head’ Can you not picture the distracted old man seeking ever and anon with absent mind for his long-accustomed head-gear, and seeking in vain? Of the gown, too, we may be equally certain for it was the procuring of this that led Ul-Jabal to the baronet’s trunk, we now know that he did not go there to *hide* the stone, for he had it not to hide, nor to *seek* it, for he would be unable to believe the baronet childish enough to deposit it in so obvious a place As for the wig and beard, they had been previously seen in his room But before he leaves the house Ul-Jabal has one more work to do once more the two eat and drink together as in ‘the old days of love’, once more the baronet is drunken with a deep sleep, and when he wakes, his skin is ‘brown as the leaves of autumn’ That is the evidence of which I spake in the beginning as giving us a hint of the exact shade of the Oriental’s colour—it was the yellowish-brown of a sere leaf And now that the face of the baronet has been smeared with this indelible pigment, all is ready for the tragedy, and Ul-Jabal departs He will return, but not immediately, for he will at least give the eyes of his victim time to grow accustomed to the change of colour in his face, nor will he tarry long, for there is no telling whether, or whither, the stone may not disappear from that outer pocket I therefore surmise that the tragedy took place a day or two ago I remembered the feebleness of the old man, his highly neurotic condition, I thought of those ‘fibrillary twitchings,’ indicating the onset of a well-known nervous disorder sure to end in sudden death, I recalled his belief that on account of the loss of the stone, in which he felt his life bound up, the chariot of death was urgent on his footsteps, I bore in mind his memory of his grandfather dying in agony just seventy years ago after seeing his own wraith by the churchyard-wall, I knew that such a man could not be struck by the sudden, the terrific shock of seeing *himself* sitting in the chair before the mirror (the chair, you remember, had been *placed* there by Ul-Jabal) without dropping down stone dead on the spot I was thus able to predict the manner

and place of the baronet's death—if he *be* dead Beside him, I said would probably be found a white stone For Ul-Jabal, his ghastly impersonation ended, would hurry to the pocket, snatch out the stone, and finding it not the stone he sought, would in all likelihood dash it down, fly away from the corpse as if from plague, and, I hope, straightway go and—hang himself ”

It was at this point that the black mask of Ham framed itself between the python-skin tapestries of the doorway I tore from him the paper, now two days old, which he held in his hand, and under the heading, “Sudden death of a Baronet,” read a nearly exact account of the facts which Zaleski had been detailing to me

“I can see by your face that I was not altogether at fault,” he said, with one of his musical laughs, “but there still remains for us to discover whence Ul-Jabal obtained his two substitutes, his motive for exchanging one for the other, and for stealing the valueless gem, but, above all, we must find where the real stone was all the time that these two men so sedulously sought it, and where it now is Now, let us turn our attention to this stone, and ask, first, what light does the inscription on the cup throw on its nature? The inscription assures us that if ‘this stone be stolen,’ or if it ‘chaunges dre,’ the House of Saul and its head ‘anoon’ (i.e. anon, at once) shall die ‘Dre,’ I may remind you, is an old English word, used, I think, by Burns, identical with the Saxon ‘*dieogan*,’ meaning to ‘suffer’ So that the writer at least contemplated that the stone might ‘suffer changes’ But what kind of changes—external or internal? External change—change of environment—is already provided for when he says, ‘shulde this Ston stalen bee’; ‘chaunges’ therefore, in *his* mind, meant internal changes But is such a thing possible for any precious stone, and for this one in particular? As to that, we might answer when we know the name of this one It nowhere appears in the manuscript, and yet it is immediately discoverable For it was a ‘sky-blue’ stone, a sky-blue, sacred stone, a sky-blue, sacred, Persian stone That at once gives us its name—it was a *turquoise* But can the turquoise, to the certain knowledge of a mediæval writer, ‘chaunges dre’? Let us turn for light to old Anselm de Boot that is he in pig-skin on the shelf behind the bronze Hera ”

I handed the volume to Zaleski He pointed to a passage which read as follows

“Assuredly the turquoise doth possess a soul more intelligent than that of man But we cannot be wholly sure of the presence of Angels in precious stones I do rather opine that the evil spirit doth take up his abode therein, transforming himself into an angel of light, to the end that we put our trust not in God, but in the precious stone, and thus, perhaps, doth he deceive our spirits by

the turquoise for the turquoise is of two sorts those which keep their colour, and those which lose it"¹

"You thus see," resumed Zaleski, "that the turquoise was believed to have the property of changing its colour—a change which was universally supposed to indicate the fading away and death of its owner The good De Boot, alas, believed this to be a property of too many other stones beside, like the Hebrews in respect of their urim and thummim, but in the case of the turquoise, at least, it is a well-authenticated natural phenomenon, and I have myself seen such a specimen In some cases the change is a gradual process, in others it may occur suddenly within an hour, especially when the gem, long kept in the dark, is exposed to brilliant sunshine I should say, however, that in this metamorphosis there is always an intermediate stage the stone first changes from blue to a pale colour spotted with brown, and, lastly, to a pure white Thus, Ul-Jabal having stolen the stone, finds that it is of the wrong colour, and soon after replaces it, he supposes that in the darkness he has selected the wrong chalice, and so takes the valueless stone from the other This, too, he replaces, and, infinitely puzzled, makes yet another hopeless trial of the Edmundsbury chalice, and, again baffled, again replaces it, concluding now that the baronet has suspected his designs, and substituted a false stone for the real one But *after* this last replacement, the stone assumes its final hue of white, and thus the baronet is led to think that two stones have been substituted by Ul-Jabal for his own invaluable gem All this while the gem was lying serenely in its place in the chalice And thus it came to pass that in the Manor-house of Saul there arose a somewhat considerable Ado about Nothing"

For a moment Zaleski paused, then, turning round and laying his hand on the brown forehead of the mummy by his side, he said

"My friend here could tell you, an he would, a fine tale of the immensely important part which jewels in all ages have played in human history, human religions, institutions, ideas He flourished some five centuries before the Messiah, was a Memphian priest of Amsu, and, as the hieroglyphics on his coffin assure me, a prime favourite with one Queen Amyntas Beneath these mouldering swaddlings of the grave a great ruby still cherishes its blood-guilty secret on the forefinger of his right hand Most curious is it to

¹ "Assurément la turquoise a une ame plus intelligente que l'ame de l'homme Mais nous ne pouvons rien établir de certain touchant la presence des Anges dans les pierres precieuses Mon jugement seroit plustot que le mauvais esprit qui se transforme en Ange de lumiere se loge dans les pierres precieuses à fin de que l'on ne recoure pas à Dieu, mais que l'on repose sa creance dans la pierre precieuse ainsi, peut-être il deçoit, nos esprits par la turquoise car la turquoise est de deux sortes les unes qui conservent leur couleur et les autres qui la perdent"—*Anselm de Boot*, Book II

reflect how in *all* lands, and at *all* times, precious minerals have been endowed by men with mystic virtues. The Persians, for instance, believed that spinelle and the garnet were harbingers of joy. Have you read the ancient Bishop of Rennes on the subject? Really, I almost think there must be some truth in all this. The instinct of universal man is rarely far at fault. Already you have a semi-comic 'gold-cure' for alcoholism, and you have heard of the geophagism of certain African tribes. What if the scientist of the future be destined to discover that the diamond, and it alone, is a specific for cholera, that powdered rubellite cures fever, and the chrysoberyl gout? It would be in exact conformity with what I have hitherto observed of a general trend towards a certain inborn perverseness and whimsicality in Nature."

Note —As some proof of the fineness of intuition evidenced by Zaleski, as distinct from his more conspicuous powers of reasoning, I may here state that some years after the occurrence of the tragedy I have recorded above, the skeleton of a man was discovered in the vaults of the Manor-house of Saul. I have not the least doubt that it was the skeleton of Ul-Jabal. The teeth were very prominent. A rotten rope was found loosely knotted round the vertebræ of his neck.

Dr Priestley

THE ELUSIVE BULLET

By
JOHN RHODE

"**B**y the way, Professor, there's something in the evening papers that might interest you," said Inspector Hanslet, handing over as he spoke the copy he had been holding in his hand "There you are, 'Prominent City Merchant found dead' Read it, it sounds quite interesting"

Dr Priestley adjusted his spectacles and began to read the paragraph The Professor and myself, Harold Merefield, who had been his secretary for a couple of years, had been sitting in the study of Dr Priestley's house in Westbourne Terrace, one fine June evening after dinner, when Inspector Hanslet had been announced The Inspector was an old friend of ours, who availed himself of the Professor's hobby, which was the mathematical detection of crime, to discuss with him any investigations upon which he happened to be engaged He had just finished giving the Professor an outline of a recent burglary case, over which the police had confessed themselves puzzled, and had risen to go, when the item in the newspaper occurred to him

"This does not appear to me to be particularly interesting," said the Professor "It merely states that on the arrival of the 3.20 train this afternoon at Tilbury station a porter, in examining the carriages, found the dead body of a man, since identified as a Mr Farquharson, lying in a corner of a first-class carriage This Mr Farquharson appears to have met his death through a blow on the side of the head, although no weapon capable of inflicting such a blow has so far been found I can only suggest that if the facts are as reported, there are at least a dozen theories which could be made to fit in with them"

"Such as?" enquired Hanslet tentatively

The Professor frowned "You know perfectly well, Inspector, that I most strongly deprecate all conjecture," he replied severely "Conjecture, unsupported by a thorough examination of facts, has been responsible for more than half the errors made by mankind throughout the ages But, to demonstrate my meaning, I will outline a couple of theories which fit in with all the reported facts Mr Farquharson may have been struck by an assailant who left the train before its arrival at Tilbury, and who disposed

of the weapon in some way. On the other hand, he may have leant out of the window, and been struck by some object at the side of the line, or even by a passing train, if he was at the right hand side of the carriage, looking in the direction in which the train was going. Of course, as I wish to emphasise, a knowledge of *all* the facts, not only those contained in this brief paragraph, would probably render both these theories untenable."

Hanslet smiled. He knew well enough from experience the Professor's passion for facts and his horror of conjecture.

"Well, I don't suppose the case will come my way," he said as he turned towards the door. "But if it does I'll let you know what transpires. I shouldn't wonder if we know the whole story in a day or two. It looks simple enough. Well, good-night, sir."

The Professor waited till the front door had closed behind him. "I have always remarked that Hanslet's difficulties are comparatively easy of solution, but that what he calls simple problems completely baffle his powers of reasoning. I should not be surprised if we heard from him again very shortly."

As usual the Professor was right. Hanslet's first visit had been on Saturday evening. On the following Tuesday, at about the same time, he called again, with a peculiarly triumphant expression on his face.

"You remember that Farquharson business, don't you, Professor?" he began without preliminary. "Well, it did come my way, after all. The Essex police called Scotland Yard in, and I was put on to it. I've solved the whole thing in under forty-eight hours. Not a bad piece of work, eh? Mr Farquharson was murdered by——"

Dr Priestly held up his hand protestingly. "My dear Inspector, I am not the least concerned with the murderer of this Mr Farquharson. As I have repeatedly told you, my interest in these matters is purely theoretical, and confined to the processes of deduction. You are beginning your story at the wrong end. If you wish me to listen to it, you must first tell me the full facts, then explain the course of your investigations, step by step."

"Very well, sir," replied Hanslet, somewhat crestfallen. "The first fact I learnt was how Farquharson was killed. It appeared at first sight that he had been struck a terrific blow by some weapon like a pole-axe. There was a wound about two inches across on the right side of his head. But, at the post-mortem, this was found to have been caused by a bullet from an ordinary service rifle, which was found imbedded in his brain."

"Ah!" remarked the Professor. "A somewhat unusual instrument of murder, surely? What position did the body occupy in the carriage when it was found?"

"Oh, in the right hand corner, facing the engine, I believe,"

replied Hanslet impatiently "But that's of no importance, as you'll see The next step, obviously, was to find out something about Farquharson, and why any one should want to murder him The discovery of a motive is a very great help in an investigation like this Farquharson lived with his daughter in a biggish house near a place called Stanford-le-Hope, on the line between Tilbury and Southend On Saturday last he left his office, which is close to Fenchurch Street station, about one o'clock He lunched at a restaurant near by, and caught the two-fifteen at Fenchurch Street As this was the train in which his dead body was found, I need hardly detail the enquiries by which I discovered these facts "

The Professor nodded "I am prepared to take your word for them," he said

"Very well, now let us come to the motive," continued Hanslet "Farquharson was in business with his nephew, a rather wild young fellow named Robert Halliday It seems that this young man's mother, Farquharson's sister, had a good deal of money in the business, and was very anxious that her son should carry it on after Farquharson's death She died a couple of years ago, leaving rather a curious will, by which all her money was to remain in her brother's business, and was to revert to her son only at her brother's death "

The Professor rubbed his hands "Ah, the indispensable motive begins to appear!" he exclaimed with a sarcastic smile "I am sure that you feel that no further facts are necessary, Inspector It follows, of course, that young Halliday murdered his uncle to secure the money You described him as a wild young man, I think? Really, the evidence is most damning!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh at me, Professor," replied Hanslet indignantly "I'll admit that you've given me a line on things that I couldn't find for myself, often enough But in this case there's no possible shadow of doubt about what happened What would you say if I told you that Halliday actually travelled in the very train in which his uncle's body was found?"

"Speaking without a full knowledge of the facts, I should say that this rather tended to establish his innocence," said the Professor gravely

Hanslet winked knowingly "Ah, but that's by no means all," he replied "Halliday is a Territorial, and he left London on Saturday afternoon in uniform, and carrying a rifle It seems that although he's very keen, he's a shocking bad marksman, and a member of a sort of awkward squad which goes down occasionally to Purfleet ranges to practise Purfleet is a station between London and Tilbury Halliday got out there, fired a number of rounds, and returned to London in the evening "

"Dear, dear, I'm sorry for that young man," remarked the

Professor "First we have a motive, then an opportunity. Of course, he travelled in the same carriage as his uncle, levelled his musket at his head, inflicted a fearful wound and decamped. Why, there's hardly a weak link in the whole chain."

"It wasn't quite as simple as that," replied Hanslet patiently. "He certainly didn't travel in the same carriage as his uncle, since that very morning they had quarrelled violently. Farquharson, who was a rather strict old boy, didn't approve of his nephew's ways. Not that I can find out much against him, but he's a bit of a young blood, and his uncle didn't like it. He travelled third class, and swears that he didn't know his uncle was on the train."

"Oh, you have interviewed him already, have you?" said the Professor quietly.

"I have," replied Hanslet. "His story is that he nearly missed the train, jumped into it at the last moment, in fact. Somewhere after Barking he found himself alone, and that's all he told me. When I asked him what he was doing scrambling along the foot-board outside the train between Dagenham and Rainham, he became very confused, and explained that on putting his head out of the window he had seen another member of the awkward squad a few carriages away, and made up his mind to join him. He gave me the man's name, and when I saw him he confirmed Halliday's story."

"Really, Inspector, your methods are masterly," said the Professor. "How did you know that he had been on the foot-board?"

"A man working on the line had seen a soldier in uniform, with a rifle slung over his back, in this position," replied Hanslet triumphantly.

"And you immediately concluded that this man must be Halliday," commented the Professor. "Well, guesses must hit the truth sometimes, I suppose. What exactly is your theory of the crime?"

"It seems plain enough," replied Hanslet. "Halliday had watched his uncle enter the train, then jumped into a carriage close to his. At a predetermined spot he clambered along with his loaded rifle, shot him through the window, then, to avert suspicion, joined his friend, whom he had also seen enter the train, a little farther on. It's as plain as a pikestaff to me."

"So it appears," remarked the Professor drily. "What steps do you propose to take in the matter?"

"I propose to arrest Halliday at the termination of the inquest," replied Hanslet complacently.

The Professor made no reply to this for several seconds. "I think it would be to everybody's advantage if you consulted me again before doing so," he said at last.

A cloud passed for an instant over Hanslet's face "I will, if you think it would do any good," he replied "But you must see for yourself that I have enough evidence to secure a conviction from any jury"

"That is just what disquiets me," returned the Professor quickly "You cannot expect the average jurymen to have an intelligence superior to yours, you know I have your promise?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied Hanslet rather huffily He changed the subject abruptly, and a few minutes later he rose and left the house

In the course of our normal routine I forgot the death of Mr Farquharson entirely It was not until the following afternoon, when Mary the parlourmaid entered the study with the announcement that a Miss Farquharson had called and begged that she might see the Professor immediately, that the matter recurred to me

"Miss Farquharson!" I exclaimed "Why, that must be the daughter of the fellow who was murdered the other day Hanslet said he had a daughter, you remember"

"The balance of probability would appear to favour that theory," replied the Professor acidly "Yes, I'll see her Show Miss Farquharson in, please, Mary"

Miss Farquharson came in, and the Professor greeted her with his usual courtesy "To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" he enquired

Miss Farquharson hesitated a moment or two before she replied She was tall and fair, dressed in deep mourning, with an elusive prettiness which I, at least, found most attractive And even before she spoke, I guessed something of the truth from the flush which suffused her face at the Professor's question

"I'm afraid you may think this an unpardonable intrusion," she said at last "The truth is that Bob—Mr Halliday—who is my cousin, has heard of you and begged me to come and see you"

The Professor frowned He hated his name becoming known in connection with any of the investigations which he undertook, but in spite of all his efforts, many people had come to know of his hobby Miss Farquharson took his frown for a sign of disapproval, and continued with an irresistible tone of pleading in her voice

"It was only as a last hope I came to you," she said "It's all so awful that I feel desperate I expect you know that my father was found dead last Saturday in a train at Tilbury, while he was on his way home?"

The Professor nodded "I am aware of some of the facts," he replied non-committally "I need not trouble you to repeat them But in what way can I be of assistance to you?"

"It's too terrible!" she exclaimed with a sob "The police

suspect Bob of having murdered him. They haven't said so, but they have been asking him all sorts of dreadful questions. Bob thought perhaps you might be able to do something——"

Her voice tailed away hopelessly under the Professor's unwinking gaze.

"My dear young lady, I am not a magician," he replied. "I may as well tell you that I have seen Inspector Hansler, who has what he considers a convincing case against your cousin."

"But you don't believe it, do you, Doctor Priestley?" interrupted Miss Farquharson eagerly.

"I can only accept the Inspector's statements as he gave them to me," replied the Professor. "I know nothing of the case beyond what he has told me. Perhaps you would allow me to ask you a few questions?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "I'll tell you everything I can."

The Professor inclined his head with a gesture of thanks. "Was your father in the habit of travelling by the two-fifteen train from Fenchurch Street on Saturday afternoons?"

"No," replied Miss Farquharson with decision. "Only when he was kept later than usual at the office. His usual custom was to come home to a late lunch."

"I see. Now, can you tell me the reason for the quarrel between him and your cousin?"

This time Miss Farquharson's reply was not so prompt. She lowered her head so that we could not see her face, and kept silence for a moment. Then, as though she had made up her mind, she spoke suddenly.

"I see no harm in telling you. As a matter of fact, Bob and I have been in love with one another for a long time, and Bob decided to tell my father on Saturday morning. Father was rather old-fashioned, and he didn't altogether approve of Bob. Not that there was any harm in anything he did, but Father couldn't understand that a young man likes to amuse himself. There was quite a scene when Bob told him, and Father refused to hear anything about it until Bob had reformed, as he put it. But I know that Bob didn't kill him," she concluded entreatingly. "It's impossible for anybody who knew him to believe he could. You don't believe it, do you?"

"No, I do not believe it," replied the Professor slowly. "If it is any consolation to you and Mr. Halliday, I may tell you in confidence that I never have believed it. When is the inquest to be?"

A look of deep thankfulness overspread her features. "I am more grateful to you than I can say, Doctor Priestley," she said earnestly. "The inquest? On Saturday morning. Will you be there?"

The Professor shook his head. "No, I shall not be there," he replied. "You see, it is not my business. But I shall take steps

before then to make certain enquiries I do not wish to raise your hopes unduly, but it is possible that I may be able to divert suspicion from Mr Halliday More than that I cannot say "

Tears of thankfulness came to her eyes "I can't tell you what this means to Bob and me," she said "He has been terribly distressed He quite understands that things look very black against him, and he cannot suggest who could have wanted to kill my father Father hadn't an enemy in the world, poor dear "

"You are sure of that?" remarked the Professor

"Quite," she replied positively "I knew every detail of his life, he never hid the smallest thing from me "

And after a further short and unimportant conversation she took her leave of us

The Professor sat silent for some minutes after her departure "Poor girl!" he said at last "To lose her father so tragically, and then to see the man she loves accused of his murder! We must see what we can do to help her, Harold Get me the one-inch map of the country between London and Tilbury, and a time-table of the Southend trains "

I hastened to obey him, and for an hour or more he pored over the map, working upon it with a rule and a protractor At the end of this period he looked up and spoke abruptly

"This is remarkably interesting, more so than I imagined at first it would be Run out and buy me the sheets of the six-inch survey which cover Rainham and Purfleet I think we shall need them "

I bought the maps he required and returned with them For the rest of the day he busied himself with these, and it was not until late in the evening that he spoke to me again

"Really, my boy, this problem is beginning to interest me," he said "There are many points about it which are distinctly baffling We must examine the country on the spot There is a train to Purfleet, I see, at ten-thirty to-morrow morning "

"Have you formed any theory, sir?" I enquired eagerly The vision of Miss Farquharson, and her conviction of her cousin's innocence, had impressed me in her favour

The Professor scowled at me "How often am I to tell you that facts are all that matter?" he replied "Our journey to-morrow will be for the purpose of ascertaining facts Until we know these, it would be waste of time to indulge in conjecture "

He did not mention the subject again until the next morning, when we were seated in the train to Purfleet He had chosen an empty first-class carriage, and himself took the right hand corner facing the engine He said nothing until the train was travelling at a good speed, and then he addressed me suddenly

"You are a good shot with a rifle, are you not?" he enquired

"I used to be pretty fair," I replied in astonishment. "But I don't think I've had a rifle in my hand since the war."

"Well, take my stick, and hold it as you would a rifle. Now go to the far end of the carriage and lean against the door. That's right. Point your stick at my right eye, as though you were going to shoot at it. Stand like that a minute. Thank you, that will do."

He turned away from me, took a pair of field-glasses from a case he was carrying, and began to survey the country through the window on his side. This he continued to do until the train drew up at Purfleet and we dismounted on to the platform.

"Ah, a lovely day!" he exclaimed. "Not too warm for a little walking. We will make our first call at Purfleet ranges. This was where young Halliday came to do his shooting, you remember."

We made our way to the ranges, and were lucky enough to find the warden at home. Dr Priestley had, when he chose, a most ingratiating way with him, and he and the warden were very shortly engaged in an animated conversation.

"By the way," enquired the Professor earnestly. "Was there any firing going on here between half-past two and three on Saturday last?"

The range-warden scratched his head with a thoughtful expression on his face. "Let me see, now, last Saturday afternoon. We had a squad of Territorials here on Saturday afternoon, but they didn't arrive till after three. Lord, they was queer hands with a rifle, some of them. Much as they could do to hit the target at all at three hundred. They won't never make marksmen, however hard they try."

"Isn't it rather dangerous to allow such wild shots to fire at all?" suggested the Professor.

"God bless your heart, sir, it's safe enough," replied the range-warden. "There's never been an accident the whole time I've been here. They can't very well miss the butts, and even if they did, there's nobody allowed on the marshes when firing's going on."

"That is comforting, certainly," said the Professor. "Apart from this squad, you had nobody else?"

The range-warden shook his head. "No, sir, they was the only people on the range that day."

"I suppose it is part of your duty to issue ammunition?" enquired the Professor.

"As a rule, sir. But, as it happens, this particular squad always brings their own with them."

The Professor continued his conversation for a little longer, then prepared to depart.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you," he said as he shook hands. "By the way, I believe there are other ranges about here somewhere?"

"That's right, sir," replied the range-warden "Over yonder, beyond the butts Rainham ranges, they're called "

"Is there any objection to my walking across the marshes to them?"

"Not a bit, sir There's no firing to-day Just keep straight on past the butts, and you'll come to them "

The Professor and I started on our tramp, the Professor pausing every hundred yards or so to look about him through his field-glasses and to verify his position on the map We reached the Rainham ranges at last, discovered the warden, who fell under the influence of the Professor's charm as readily as his colleague at Purfleet had done, and opened the conversation with him in much the same style

"On Saturday afternoon last, between half-past two and three?" replied the warden to the Professor's enquiry "Well, sir, not what you might call any shooting There was a party from Woolwich, with a new sort of light machine gun, something like a Lewis But they wasn't shooting, only testing "

"What is the difference?" asked the Professor

"Well, sir, by testing I mean they had the thing held in a clamp, so that it couldn't move The idea is to keep it pointing in exactly the same direction, instead of wobbling about as it might if a man was holding it They use a special target, and measure up the distance between the various bullet holes on it when they've finished "

"I see," replied the Professor "I wonder if you would mind showing me where they were firing from?"

"Certainly, sir, it's close handy " The range-warden led us to a firing-point near by, and pointed out the spot on which the stand had been erected

"That's the place, sir They were firing at Number 10 target over yonder A thousand yards it is, and wonderful accurate the new gun seemed Shot the target to pieces, they did "

The Professor made no reply, but took out his map and drew a line upon it from the firing point to the butts The line, when extended, led over a tract of desolate marshes until it met the river

"There is very little danger on these ranges, it appears," remarked the Professor, with a note of annoyance in his voice "If a shot missed the butts altogether, it could only fall into the river, far away from any frequented spot "

"That's what they were laid out for," replied the range-warden "You see, on the other side there's a house or two, to say nothing of the road and the railway It wouldn't do to have any stray rounds falling among them "

"It certainly would not," replied the Professor absently "I see by the map that Rainham station is not far beyond the end of

the ranges Is there any objection to my walking to it past the butts?"

"None at all, sir, it's the best way to get there when there's no firing on Thank you, sir, it's been no trouble at all"

We started to walk down the ranges, a puzzled frown on the Professor's face Every few yards he stopped and examined the country through his glasses, or pulled out the map and stared at it with an absorbed expression We had reached the butts before he said a word, and then it was not until we had climbed to the top of them that he spoke

"Very puzzling, very!" he muttered "There must of course be some explanation A mathematical deduction from facts can never be false But I wish I could discover the explanation"

He was looking through his field glasses as he spoke, and suddenly his attention became riveted upon an object in front of him Without waiting for me he hurried down the steep sides of the butts, and almost ran towards a flagstaff standing a couple of hundred yards on the far side of them When he arrived at the base of it, he drew a couple of lines on the map, walked half round the flagstaff and gazed intently through his glasses By the time I had caught up with him he had put the glasses back in their case, and was smiling benevolently

"We can return to town by the next train, my boy," he said cheerfully "I have ascertained everything I wished to know"

He refused to say a word until our train was running into Fenchurch Street station Then suddenly he turned to me

"I am going to the War Office," he said curtly "Will you go to Scotland Yard, see Inspector Hanslet, and ask him to come to Westbourne Terrace as soon as he can?"

I found Hanslet, after some little trouble, and gave him the Professor's message

"Something to do with the Farquharson business, I suppose?" he replied "Well, I'll come if the Professor wants to see me But I've got it all fixed up without his help"

He turned up, true to his promise, and the Professor greeted him with a pleasant smile

"Good evening, Inspector, I'm glad you were able to come Will you be particularly busy to-morrow morning?"

"I don't think so, Professor," replied Hanslet in a puzzled voice "Do you want me to do anything?"

"Well, if you can spare the time, I should like to introduce you, to the murderer of Mr Farquharson," said the Professor casually

Hanslet lay back in his chair and laughed "Thanks very much, Professor, but I've met him already," he replied "It would be a waste of your time, I'm afraid"

"Never mind," said the Professor, with a tolerant smile "I

assure you that it will be worth your while to spend the morning with me Will you meet me by the bookstall at Charing Cross at half-past ten?"

Hanslet reflected for a moment The Professor had never yet led him on a wild goose chase, and it might be worth while to humour him

"All right," he replied reluctantly "I'll come But I warn you it's no good"

The Professor smiled, but said nothing Hanslet took his leave of us, and the Professor appeared to put all thought of the Farquharson case out of his head

We met again at Charing Cross the next day The Professor had taken tickets to Woolwich, and we got out of the train there and walked to the gates of the Arsenal The Professor took an official letter out of his pocket, which he gave to the porter In a few minutes we were led to an office, where a young officer rose to greet us

"Good morning, Doctor Priestley," he said "Colonel Conyng-ham rang me up to say that you were coming You want to see the stand we use for testing the new automatic rifle? It happens to be in the yard below, being repaired"

"Being repaired?" repeated the Professor quickly "May I ask what is the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing serious We used it at Rainham the other day, and the clamp broke just as we were finishing a series We had fired ninety-nine rounds out of a hundred, when the muzzle of the gun slipped up I don't know what happened to the round I suppose it went into the river somewhere Beastly nuisance, we shall have to go down and start all over again"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor, in a satisfied tone "That explains it But I wouldn't use Number 10 target again, if I were you Can we see this stand?"

"Certainly," replied the officer "Come along"

He led us into the yard, where a sort of tripod with a clamp at the head of it was standing The Professor looked at it earnestly for some moments, then turned to Hanslet

"There you see the murderer of Mr Farquharson," he said quietly

Of course Hanslet, the officer and myself bombarded him with questions, which he refused to answer until we had returned to London and were seated in his study Then, fixing his eyes upon the ceiling and putting the tips of his fingers together, he began

"It was, to any intelligent man, perfectly obvious that there are half a dozen reasons why young Halliday could not have shot his uncle In the first place, he must have fired at very close range, from one side or other of the carriage, and a rifle bullet fired at

such a range, although it very often makes a very extensive wound of entry, does not stay in a man's brain. It travels right through his head, with very slightly diminished velocity. Next, if Halliday fired at his uncle at all, it must have been from the left hand side of the carriage. Had he fired from the right hand side, the muzzle of the weapon would have been almost touching his victim, and there would have been signs of burning or blackening round the wound. Do you admit this, Inspector?"

"Of course," replied Hanslet. "My theory always has been that he fired from the left hand side."

"Very well," said the Professor quickly. "Now Halliday is notoriously a very bad shot, hence his journey to Purfleet, Harold, on the contrary, is a good shot. Yet during our expedition of yesterday, I asked him to aim at my right eye with a stick while the train was in motion. I found that never for an instant could he point the stick at it. I find it impossible to believe that a bad shot, firing from the footboard and therefore compelled to use one hand at least to retain his hold, could shoot a man on the far side of the carriage exactly on the temple."

The Professor paused, and Hanslet looked at him doubtfully.

"It all sounds very plausible, Professor, but until you can produce a better explanation I shall continue to believe that my own is the correct one."

"Exactly. It was to verify a theory which I had formed that I carried out my investigations. It was perfectly obvious to me, from your description of the wound, that it had been inflicted by a bullet very near the end of its flight, and therefore possessing only enough velocity to penetrate the skull without passing through it. This meant that it had been fired from a considerable distance away. Upon consulting the map, I discovered that there were two rifle ranges near the railway between London and Tilbury. I could not help feeling that the source of the bullet was probably one of these ranges. It was, at all events, a possibility worth investigating."

"But at the outset I was faced with what seemed an insuperable objection. I deduced from the map, a deduction subsequently verified by examination of the ground, that a round fired at any of the targets on either range would take a direction away from the railway. I also discovered that the only rounds fired while the train in which Mr Farquharson's body was found was passing the ranges were by an experimental party from the Arsenal. This party employed a special device which eliminated any inaccuracy due to the human element. At this point it occurred to me that my theory was incapable of proof, although I still adhered to my view that it was correct."

The Professor paused and Hanslet ventured to remark

"I still do not see how you can prove that the breakage of the clamp could have been responsible," he said "The direction of the bullet remained the same, and only its elevation was affected. By your own showing, the last shot fired from the machine must have landed in the marshes or the river."

"I knew very well that notwithstanding the apparent impossibility, this must have been the bullet which killed Mr Farquharson," replied the Professor equably "I climbed the butts behind the target at which the Arsenal party had been firing, and while there I made an interesting discovery which solved the difficulty at once. Directly in line with Number 10 target and some distance behind it was a flagstaff. Further, upon examination of this flagstaff I discovered that it was made of steel."

"Now the map had told me that there was only a short stretch of line upon which a train could be struck by a bullet deflected by this flagstaff. If this had indeed been the case, I knew exactly where to look for traces, and at my first inspection I found them. High up on the staff is a scar where the paint has recently been removed. To my mind the cause of Mr Farquharson's death is adequately explained."

Hanslet whistled softly "By Jove, there's something in it!" he exclaimed "Your theory, I take it, is that Farquharson was struck by a bullet deflected by the flagstaff?"

"Of course," replied the Professor "He was sitting on the right hand side of the carriage, facing the engine. He was struck on the right side of the head, which supports the theory of a bullet coming through an open window. A bullet deflected in this way usually turns over and over for the rest of its flight, which accounts for the size of the wound. Have you any objection to offer?"

"Not at the moment," said Hanslet cautiously "I shall have to verify all these facts, of course. For one thing, I must take the bullet to the Arsenal and see if it is one of the same type as the experimental party were using."

"Verify everything you can, certainly," replied the Professor "But remember that facts, not conjecture, are what should guide you."

Hanslet nodded "I'll remember, Professor," he said. And with that he left us.

Two days later Mary announced Miss Farquharson and Mr Halliday. They entered the room, and Halliday walked straight up to the Professor and grasped his hand.

"You have rendered me the greatest service one man can render to another, sir!" he exclaimed "Inspector Hanslet tells me that all suspicion that I murdered my uncle has been cleared away, and that this is due entirely to your efforts."

Before the Professor could reply, Miss Farquharson ran up to him and kissed him impulsively "Doctor Priestley, you're a darling!" she exclaimed

The Professor beamed at her through his spectacles "Really, my dear, you make me feel quite sorry that you are going to marry this young man," he said

Arsene Lupin

THE MYSTERIOUS RAILWAY PASSENGER

By
MAURICE LEBLANC

I HAD sent my motor-car to Rouen by road on the previous day. I was to meet it by train and go on to some friends who have a house on the Seine.

A few minutes before we left Paris, my compartment was invaded by seven gentlemen, five of whom were smoking. Short though the journey by the fast train be, I did not relish the prospect of taking it in such company, the more so as the old-fashioned carriage had no corridor. I therefore collected my overcoat, my newspapers and my railway-guide and sought refuge in one of the neighbouring compartments.

It was occupied by a lady. At the sight of me she made a movement of vexation which did not escape my notice, and leant towards a gentleman standing on the footboard, her husband, no doubt, who had come to see her off. The gentleman took stock of me and the examination seemed to conclude to my advantage, for he whispered to his wife and smiled, giving her the look with which we reassure a frightened child. She smiled in her turn, and cast a friendly glance in my direction, as though she suddenly realised that I was one of those decent men with whom a woman can remain locked up for an hour or two, in a little box six feet square, without having anything to fear.

Her husband said to her:

"You mustn't mind, darling, but I have an important appointment and I can't wait."

He kissed her affectionately and went away. His wife blew him some discreet little kisses through the window and waved her handkerchief.

Then the guard's whistle sounded and the train started.

At that moment, and in spite of the warning shouts of the railway-officials, the door opened and a man burst into our carriage. My travelling-companion, who was standing up and arranging her things in the rack, uttered a cry of terror and dropped down upon the seat.

I am no coward, far from it; but I confess that these sudden

incursions at the last minute are always annoying. They seem so ambiguous, so unnatural. There must be something behind them, else

The appearance and bearing of the newcomer, however, were such as to correct the bad impression produced by the manner of his entrance. He was neatly, almost smartly dressed, his tie was in good taste, his gloves clean, he had a powerful face. But speaking of his face, where on earth had I seen it before? For I had seen it, of that there was no doubt. Or at least, to be accurate, I found within myself that sort of recollection which is left by the sight of an oft-seen portrait of which one has never beheld the original. And at the same time I felt the uselessness of any effort of memory that I might exert, so inconsistent and vague was that recollection.

But when my eyes reverted to the lady, I sat astounded at the pallor and disorder of her features. She was staring at her neighbour—he was seated on the same side of the carriage—with an expression of genuine affright, and I saw one of her hands steal trembling towards a little wrist-bag that lay on the cushion a few inches from her lap. She ended by taking hold of it and nervously drawing it to her.

Our eyes met and I read in hers so great an amount of uneasiness and anxiety that I could not help saying

“I hope you are not unwell, madame?” Shall I open the window?”

She made no reply, but with a timid gesture called my attention to the man. I smiled as her husband had done, shrugged my shoulders, and explained to her by signs that she had no cause for alarm, that I was there and that, besides, the gentleman seemed quite harmless.

Just then, he turned towards us, and after contemplating us, one after the other, from head to foot, huddled himself into his corner and made no further movement.

A silence ensued, but the lady, as though summoning all her energies to perform an act of despair, said to me, in a hardly intelligible tone

“You know he is in our train?”

“Who?”

“Why, he he himself I assure you.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“Arsène Lupin!”

She had not removed her eyes from the passenger, and it was at him rather than at me that she flung the syllables of that dread name.

He pulled his hat down upon his nose. Was this to conceal his agitation, or was he merely preparing to go to sleep?

I objected

"Arsène Lupin was sentenced yesterday, in his absence, to twenty years' penal servitude. It is not likely that he would commit the imprudence of showing himself in public to-day. Besides, the newspapers have discovered that he has been spending the winter in Turkey, ever since his famous escape from the Santé."

"He is in this train," repeated the lady, with the more and more marked intention of being overheard by our companion. "My husband is a deputy prison-governor, and the station-inspector himself told us that they were looking for Arsène Lupin."

"That is no reason why"

"He was seen at the booking-office. He took a ticket for Rouen."

"It would have been easy to lay hands upon him."

"He disappeared. The ticket-collector at the door of the waiting-room did not see him, but they thought that he must have gone round by the suburban platforms and stepped into the express that leaves ten minutes after us."

"In that case, they will have caught him there."

"And supposing that, at the last moment, he jumped out of the express and entered this, our own train. . . as he probably as he most certainly did?"

"In that case they will catch him here. For the porters and the police cannot have failed to see him going from one train to the other and, when we reach Rouen, they will nab him finely."

"Him? Never! He will find some means of escaping again."

"In that case, I wish him a good journey."

"But think of all that he may do in the meantime!"

"What?"

"How can I tell? One must be prepared for anything."

She was greatly agitated, and, in point of fact, the situation, to a certain degree, warranted her nervous state of excitement. Almost in spite of myself, I said

"There are such things as curious coincidences, it is true. . . But calm yourself. Admitting that Arsène Lupin is in one of these carriages, he is sure to keep quiet and, rather than bring fresh trouble upon himself, he will have no other idea than to avoid the danger that threatens him."

My words failed to reassure her. However, she said no more, fearing, no doubt, lest I should think her troublesome.

As for myself, I opened my newspapers and read the reports of Arsène Lupin's trial. They contained nothing that was not already known and they interested me but slightly. Moreover, I was tired, I had had a poor night, I felt my eyelids growing heavy and my head began to nod.

"But surely, sir, you are not going to sleep!"

The lady snatched my paper from my hands and looked at me with indignation

"Certainly not," I replied "I have no wish to "

"It would be most imprudent," she said

"Most," I repeated

And I struggled hard, fixing my eyes on the landscape, on the clouds that streaked the sky And soon all this became confused in space, the picture of the excited lady and the drowsy man was obliterated from my mind and I was filled with the great, deep silence of sleep

It was soon made agreeable by light and incoherent dreams, in which a being who played the part and bore the name of Arsène Lupin occupied a certain place He turned and shifted on the horizon, his back laden with valuables, clambering over walls and stripping country houses of their contents

But the outline of this being, who had ceased to be Arsène Lupin, grew more distinct He came towards me, grew bigger and bigger, leapt into the carriage with incredible agility and fell full upon my chest

A sharp pain a piercing scream I awoke The man, my fellow-traveller, with one knee on my chest, was clutching my throat

I saw this very dimly, for my eyes were shot with blood I also saw the lady, in a corner, writhing in a violent fit of hysterics I did not even attempt to resist I should not have had the strength for it, had I wished to, my temples were throbbing, I choked my throat rattled Another minute and I should have been suffocated

The man must have felt this He loosened his grip Without leaving hold of me, with his right hand he stretched a rope, in which he had prepared a slip-knot, and with a quick turn tied my wrists together In a moment I was bound, gagged, rendered motionless and helpless

And he performed this task in the most natural manner in the world, with an ease that revealed the knowledge of a master, of an expert in theft and crime Not a word, not a fevered movement Sheer coolness and audacity And there was I on the seat, tied up like a mummy—I, Arsène Lupin!

It was really ridiculous And notwithstanding the seriousness of the circumstances, I could not but appreciate and almost enjoy the irony of the situation Arsène Lupin "done" like a novice! Stripped like the first-comer—for of course the scoundrel relieved me of my pocket-book and purse! Arsène Lupin victimised in his turn, duped, defeated! What an adventure!

There remained the lady He took no notice of her at all He contented himself with picking up the wrist-bag that lay on the floor

and extracting the jewels, the purse, the gold and silver knick-knacks which it contained. The lady opened her eyes, shuddered with fright, took off her rings and handed them to the man, as though she wished to spare him any superfluous exertion. He took the rings and looked at her—she fainted away.

Then, calm and silent as before, without troubling about us further, he resumed his seat, lit a cigarette, and abandoned himself to a careful scrutiny of the treasures which he had captured, the inspection of which seemed to satisfy him completely.

I was much less satisfied. I am not speaking of the twelve thousand francs of which I had been unduly plundered—this was a loss which I accepted only for the time, I had no doubt that those twelve thousand francs would return to my possession after a short interval, together with the exceedingly important papers which my pocket-book contained—plans, estimates, specifications, addresses, lists of correspondents, letters of a compromising character. But, for the moment, a more immediate and serious care was worrying me—what was to happen next?

As may be readily imagined, the excitement caused by my passing through the Gare Saint-Lazare had not escaped me. As I was going to stay with friends who knew me by the name of Guillaume Berlat and to whom my resemblance to Arsène Lupin was the occasion of many a friendly jest, I had not been able to disguise myself after my wont and my presence had been discovered. Moreover, a man, doubtless Arsène Lupin, had been seen to rush from the express into the other train. Hence it was inevitable and fated that the commissary of police at Rouen, warned by telegram, would await the arrival of the train, assisted by a respectable number of constables, question any suspicious passengers and proceed to make a minute inspection of the carriages.

All this I had foreseen and had not felt greatly excited about it, for I was certain that the Rouen police would display no greater perspicacity than the Paris police and that I should have been able to pass unperceived—was it not sufficient for me, at the wicket, carelessly to show my deputy's card, thanks to which I had already inspired the ticket-collector at the Saint-Lazare with every confidence? But how things had changed since then! I was no longer free. It was impossible to attempt one of my usual moves. In one of the carriages the Commissary would discover the *Sieur* Arsène Lupin, whom a propitious fate was sending to him bound hand and foot, gentle as a lamb, packed up complete. He had only to accept delivery, just as you receive a parcel addressed to you at a railway-station, a hamper of game or a basket of vegetables and fruit.

And to avoid this annoying catastrophe what could I do, entangled as I was in my bonds?

And the train was speeding towards Rouen, the next and only

stopping-place, it rushed through Vernon, through Saint-Pierre

I was puzzled also by another problem, in which I was not so directly interested, but the solution of which aroused my professional curiosity. What were my fellow-traveller's intentions?

If I had been alone, he would have had ample time to alight quite calmly at Rouen. But the lady? As soon as the carriage door was opened, the lady, meek and quiet as she sat at present, would scream and throw herself about and cry for assistance!

Hence my astonishment. Why did he not reduce her to the same state of helplessness as myself, which would have given him time to disappear before his two-fold misdemeanour was discovered?

He was still smoking, his eyes fixed on the view outside, which a hesitating rain was beginning to streak with long, slanting lines. Once, however, he turned round, took up my railway-guide and consulted it.

As for the lady, she made every effort to continue fainting, so as to quiet her enemy. But a fit of coughing, produced by the smoke, gave the lie to her pretended swoon.

Myself, I was very uncomfortable and had pains all over my body. And I thought . . . I planned . . .

Pont-de-l'Arche Oissell The train was hurrying on,
glad drunk with speed . Saint-Etienne

At that moment, the man rose and took two steps towards us, to which the lady hastened to reply with a new scream and a genuine fainting-fit.

But what could his object be? He lowered the window on our side. The rain was now falling in torrents and he made a movement of annoyance at having neither umbrella nor overcoat. He looked up at the rack. The lady's en-tout-case was there, he took it. He also took my overcoat and put it on.

We were crossing the Seine. He turned up his trousers and then, leaning out of the window, raised the outer latch.

Did he mean to fling himself on the permanent way? At the rate at which we were going, it would have been certain death. We plunged into the tunnel through the Côte Sainte-Catherine. The man opened the door and, with one foot, felt for the step. What madness! The darkness, the smoke, the din all combined to lend a fantastic appearance to any such attempt. But, suddenly, the train slowed up, the Westinghouse brakes counteracted the movement of the wheels. In a minute the pace from fast became normal and decreased still more. Without a doubt, there was a gang at work repairing this part of the tunnel, this would necessitate a slower passage of the trains, for some days perhaps, and the man knew it.

He had only, therefore, to put his other foot on the step, climb down to the footboard and walk quietly away, not without first closing the door and throwing back the latch. He had scarcely dis-

appeared when the smoke showed whiter in the daylight We emerged into a valley One more tunnel and we should be at Rouen

The lady at once recovered her wits and her first care was to bewail the loss of her jewels I gave her a beseeching glance She understood and relieved me of the gag which was stifling me She wanted also to unfasten my bonds, but I stopped her

"No, no the police must see everything as it was I want them to be fully informed as regards that blackguard's actions "

"Shall I pull the alarm signal?"

"Too late, you should have thought of that while he was attacking me "

"But he would have killed me! Ah, sir, didn't I tell you that he was travelling by this train? I knew him at once, by his portrait And now he's taken my jewels "

"They'll catch him, have no fear "

"Catch Arsène Lupin! Never "

"It all depends on you, madame Listen When we arrive, be at the window, call out, make a noise The police and porters will come up Tell them what you have seen, in a few words the assault of which I was the victim and the flight of Arsène Lupin Give his description a soft hat, an umbrella—yours—a grey frock overcoat "

"Yours," she said

"Mine? No, his own I didn't have one "

"I thought that he had none either when he got in "

"He must have had unless it was a coat which some one had left behind in the rack In any case, he had it when he got out and that is the essential thing A grey frock overcoat, remember Oh, I was forgetting tell them your name to start with Your husband's position will stimulate their zeal "

We were arriving She was already leaning out of the window I resumed, in a louder, almost imperious voice, so that my words should sink into her brain

"Give my name also, Guillaume Berlat If necessary, say you know me That will save time we must hurry on the preliminary inquiries the important thing is to catch Arsène Lupin with your jewels You quite understand, don't you? Guillaume Berlat, a friend of your husband's "

"Quite Guillaume Berlat "

She was already calling out and gesticulating Before the train had come to a standstill, a gentleman climbed in, followed by a number of other men The critical hour was at hand

Breathless, the lady exclaimed

"Arsène Lupin he attacked us he has stolen my jewels I am Madame Renaud my husband is a deputy prison-

governor Ah, here is my brother, Georges Andelle, manager of the Crédit Rouennais What I want to say is "

She kissed a young man who had just come up and who exchanged greetings with the commissary of police She continued, weeping -

"Yes, Arsène Lupin . He flew at this gentleman's throat in his sleep Monsieur Berlat, a friend of my husband's."

"But where is Arsène Lupin?"

"He jumped out of the train in the tunnel, after we crossed the Seine "

"Are you sure it was he?"

"Certain, I recognised him at once Besides, he was seen at the Gare Saint-Lazare He was wearing a soft hat "

"No, a hard felt hat, like this," said the commissary, pointing to my hat

"A soft hat, I assure you," repeated Madame Renaud, "and a grey frock overcoat."

"Yes," muttered the commissary, "the telegram mentions a grey frock overcoat with a black velvet collar "

"A black velvet collar, that's it!" exclaimed Madame Renaud, triumphantly

I breathed again What a good, excellent friend I had found in her!

Meanwhile, the policeman had released me from my bonds I bit my lips violently till the blood flowed Bent in two, with my handkerchief to my mouth, as seems proper to a man who has long been sitting in a constrained position and who bears on his face the blood-stained marks of the gag, I said to the commissary, in a feeble voice.

"Sir, it was Arsène Lupin, there is no doubt of it . You can catch him, if you hurry . . I think I may be of some use to you . ."

The coach, which was needed for the inspection by the police, was slipped The remainder of the train went on to Le Harve We were taken to the station-master's office through a crowd of onlookers who filled the platform

Just then, I felt a hesitation I must make some excuse to absent myself, find my motor-car and be off It was dangerous to wait. If anything happened, if a telegram came from Paris, I was lost

Yes, but what about my robber? Left to my own resources, in a district with which I was not very familiar, I could never hope to come up with him

"Bah!" I said to myself "Let us risk it and stay It's a difficult hand to win, but a very amusing one to play And the stakes are worth the trouble "

And as we were being asked provisionally to repeat our depositions, I exclaimed

"Mr Commissary, Arsène Lupin is at this moment getting a start of us. My motor is waiting for me in the station-yard. If you will do me the pleasure to accept a seat in it, we will try "

The commissary gave a knowing smile

"It's not a bad idea such a good idea, in fact, that it's already being carried out "

"Oh?"

"Yes, two of my officers started on bicycles some time ago "

"But where to?"

"To the entrance to the tunnel. There they will pick up the clues and the evidence and follow the track of Arsène Lupin "

I could not help shrugging my shoulders

"Your two officers will pick up no clues and no evidence "

"Really!"

"Arsène Lupin will have arranged that no one should see him leave the tunnel. He will have taken the nearest road and, from there "

"From there made for Rouen, where we shall catch him "

"He will not go to Rouen "

"In that case, he will remain in the neighbourhood, where we shall be even more certain "

"He will not remain in the neighbourhood "

"Oh? Then where will he hide himself?"

I took out my watch

"At the present moment Arsène Lupin is hanging about the station at Darnétal. At ten-fifty, that is to say, in twenty-two minutes from now, he will take the train which leaves Rouen, from the Gare du Nord, for Amiens "

"Do you think so? And how do you know?"

"Oh, it's very simple. In the carriage, Arsène Lupin consulted my railway-guide. What for? To see if there was another line near the place where he disappeared, a station on that line and a train which stopped at that station. I have just looked at the guide myself and learnt what I wanted to know "

"Upon my word, sir," said the commissary, "you possess marvellous powers of deduction. What an expert you must be!"

Dragged on by my conviction, I had blundered into displaying too much cleverness. He looked at me in astonishment and I saw that a suspicion flickered through his mind. Only just, it is true, for the photographs dispatched in every direction were so unlike, represented an Arsène Lupin so different from the one that stood before him, that he could not possibly recognise the original in me. Nevertheless, he was troubled, restless, perplexed

There was a moment of silence. A certain ambiguity and doubt

seemed to interrupt our words. A shudder of anxiety passed through me? Was luck about to turn against me? Mastering myself, I began to laugh.

"Ah, well, there's nothing to sharpen one's wits like the loss of a pocket-book and the desire to find it again. And it seems to me that, if you will give me two of your men, the three of us might, perhaps "

"Oh, please, M. Commissary," exclaimed Madame Renaud, "do what Monsieur Berlat suggests."

My kind friend's intervention turned the scale. Uttered by her, the wife of an influential person, the name of Berlat became mine in reality and conferred upon me an identity which no suspicion could touch. The commissary rose.

"Believe me, Monsieur Berlat, I shall be only too pleased to see you succeed. I am as anxious as yourself to have Arsène Lupin arrested."

He escorted me to my car. He introduced two of his men to me: Honoré Massol and Gaston Delivet. They took their seats. I placed myself at the wheel. My chauffeur started the engine. A few seconds later we had left the station. I was saved.

I confess that, as we dashed in my powerful 35-h.p. Moreau-Lepton along the boulevards that skirt the old Norman city, I was not without a certain sense of pride. The engine hummed harmoniously. The trees sped behind us to right and left. And now, free and out of danger, I had nothing to do but to settle my little private affairs, with the co-operation of those two worthy representatives of the law. Arsène Lupin was going in search of Arsène Lupin.

Ye humble mainstays of the social order of things, Gaston Delivet and Honoré Massol, how precious was your assistance to me! Where should I have been without you? But for you, at how many cross-roads should I have taken the wrong turning! But for you, Arsène Lupin would have gone astray and the other escaped!

But all was not over yet. Far from it. I had first to capture the fellow and next to take possession, myself, of the papers of which he had robbed me. At no cost must my two satellites be allowed to catch a sight of these documents, much less lay hands upon them. To make use of them and yet act independently of them was what I wanted to do, and it was no easy matter.

We reached Darnétal three minutes after the train had left. I had the consolation of learning that a man in a grey frock overcoat with a black velvet collar had got into a second-class carriage, with a ticket for Amiens. There was no doubt about it: my first appearance as a detective was a promising one.

Delivet said:

"The train is an express and does not stop before Montérolier-

Buchy, in nineteen minutes from now. If we are not there before Arsène Lupin, he can go on toward Amiens, branch off to Clères, and, from there, make for Dieppe or Paris."

"How far is Montérolier?"

"Fourteen miles and a half."

"Fourteen miles and a half in nineteen minutes. We shall be there before him."

It was a stirring race. Never had my trusty Moreau-Lepton responded to my impatience with greater ardour and regularity. It seemed to me as though I communicated my wishes to her directly, without the intermediary of levers or handles. She shared my desires. She approved of my determination. She understood my animosity against that blackguard Arsène Lupin. The scoundrel! The sneak! Should I get the better of him? Or would he once more baffle authority, that authority of which I was the embodiment?

"Right!" cried Delivet. "Left! Straight ahead!"

We skimmed the ground. The milestones looked like little timid animals, that fled at our approach.

And suddenly, at the turn of a road, a cloud of smoke, the north express!

For half a mile, it was a struggle, side by side, an unequal struggle, of which the issue was certain. We beat the train by twenty lengths.

In three seconds we were on the platform, in front of the second-class. The doors were flung open. A few people stepped out. My thief was not among them. We examined the carriages. No Arsène Lupin.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "He must have recognised me in the motor, while we were going alongside, and jumped out!"

The guard of the train confirmed my supposition. He had seen a man scrambling down the embankment, at two hundred yards from the station.

"There he is! Look! At the level crossing!"

I darted in pursuit, followed by my two satellites, or rather by one of them, for the other, Massol, turned out to be an uncommonly fast sprinter, gifted with both speed and staying power. In a few seconds, the distance between him and the fugitive was greatly diminished. The man saw him, jumped a hedge and scampered off towards a slope, which he climbed. We saw him farther still, entering a little wood.

When we reached the wood, we found Massol waiting for us. He had thought it wiser not to go on, lest he should lose us.

"You are quite right, my dear fellow," I said. "After a run like this, our friend must be exhausted. We've got him."

I examined the skirts of the wood, while thinking how I could best

proceed alone to arrest the fugitive, in order myself to effect certain recoveries which the law, no doubt, would only have allowed after a number of disagreeable inquiries. Then I returned to my companions.

"Look here, it's quite easy. You, Massol, take up your position on the left. You, Delivet, on the right. From there you can watch the whole rear of the wood and he can't leave it, unseen by you, except by this hollow way, where I shall stand. If he does not come out, I'll go in and force him back towards one or the other. You have nothing to do, therefore, but wait. Oh, I was forgetting—in case of alarm, I'll fire a shot."

Massol and Delivet moved off, each to his own side. As soon as they were out of sight, I made my way into the wood, with infinite precautions, so as to be neither seen nor heard. It consisted of close thickets, contrived for the shooting, and intersected by very narrow paths in which it was only possible to walk by stooping, as though in a leafy tunnel.

One of these ended in a glade where the damp grass showed the marks of footsteps. I followed them, taking care to steal through the underwood. They led me to the bottom of a little mound, crowned by a rickety lath-and-plaster hovel.

"He must be there," I thought. "He has chosen a good post of observation."

I crawled close up to the building. A slight sound warned me of his presence and, in fact, I caught sight of him through an opening, with his back turned towards me.

Two bounds brought me upon him. He tried to point the revolver which he held in his hand. I did not give him time, but pulled him to the ground, in such a way that his two arms were twisted and caught under him, while I held him pinned down with my knee upon his chest.

"Listen to me, old chap," I whispered in his ear. "I am Arsène Lupin. You've got to give me back my pocket-book and the lady's wrist-bag, this minute and without fuss—in return for which I'll save you from the clutches of the police and enrol you among my pals. Which is it to be—yes or no?"

"Yes," he muttered.

"That's right. Your plan of this morning was cleverly thought out. We shall be good friends."

I got up. He fumbled in his pocket, fetched out a great knife, and tried to strike me with it.

"You ass!" I cried.

With one hand I parried the attack. With the other, I caught him a violent blow on the carotid artery, the blow which is known as "the carotid hook." He fell back stunned.

In my pocket-book, I found my papers and bank-notes. I took

his own out of curiosity On an envelope addressed to him I read his name Pierre Onfrey

I gave a start Pierre Onfrey, the perpetrator of the murder in the Rue Lafontaine at Auteuil! Pierre Onfrey, the man who had cut the throats of Madame Delbois and her two daughters! I bent over him Yes, that was the face which, in the railway-carriage, had aroused in me the memory of features which I had seen before

But time was passing I placed two hundred-franc notes in an envelope, with a visiting-card bearing these words

“Arsène Lupin to his worthy assistants, Honoré Massol and Gaston Delivet, with his best thanks”

I laid this where it could be seen, in the middle of the room Beside it, I placed Madame Renaud's wrist-bag Why should it not be restored to the kind friend who had rescued me? I confess, however, that I took from it everything that seemed in any way interesting, leaving only a tortoise-shell comb, a stick of lip-salve, and an empty purse Business is business, when all is said and done! And besides, her husband followed such a disreputable occupation !

There remained the man He was beginning to move What was I to do? I was not qualified either to save or to condemn him

I took away his weapons and fired my revolver in the air

“That will bring the two others,” I thought “He must find a way out of his difficulties Let fate take its course”

And I went down the hollow way at a run

Twenty minutes later, a cross-road, which I had noticed during our pursuit, brought me back to my car

At four o'clock, I telegraphed to my friends from Rouen that an unexpected incident compelled me to put off my visit Between ourselves, I greatly fear that, in view of what they must now have learned, I shall be obliged to postpone it indefinitely It will be a cruel disappointment for them!

At six o'clock, I returned to Paris by L'Isle-Adam, Enghien and the Porte Bineau

I gathered from the evening papers that the police had at last succeeded in capturing Pierre Onfrey

The next morning—why should we despise the advantages of intelligent advertisement?—the *Echo de France* contained the following sensational paragraph

“Yesterday, near Buchy, after a number of incidents, Arsène Lupin effected the arrest of Pierre Onfrey The Auteuil mur-

derer had robbed a lady of the name of Renaud, the wife of the deputy prison-governor, in the train between Paris and Le Havre Arsène Lupin has restored to Madame Renaud the wrist-bag which contained her jewels and has generously rewarded the two detectives who assisted him in the matter of this dramatic arrest ”

Inspector Silver

THE ALMOST PERFECT CRIME

By

HENRY HOLT

At his club, Mr David Porlock leaned back in a comfortable chair and lighted a well-seasoned cigar, content with the good things of this world. He had dined, as he did everything, deliberately and artistically.

After watching the first fragrant wisps of smoke go upward, he turned his attention to the golden-hued contents of a liqueur glass, and was on the point of raising it to his lips when a waiter approached with a card on a silver salver.

"Detective-Inspector Silver, of New Scotland Yard," Mr Porlock read aloud, with an impassive face. "What does he want?"

"He didn't say, sir."

"Show him into the visitors' room. I will be there in a few minutes."

Mr Porlock finished the liqueur and, in his own good time, strolled away to see what Scotland Yard could want of him.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, sir," said Inspector Silver. "It's about Mr Charles Cavendish, the bank manager."

"Cavendish? What's wrong with him?" asked Mr Porlock with quick interest.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. He seems to have disappeared in some mysterious way."

Porlock's expression, which had become serious, suddenly relaxed.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said. "Men like Cavendish don't disappear. He dined with me last night. There can't be very much wrong."

"That's what everybody hopes, but he never got home last night, and he hasn't been seen since."

Porlock's eyes held a puzzled look as they rested on those of the CID man.

"I can't understand it," he said. "Mr Cavendish seemed all right when he left here."

"What time was that, sir?"

"Oh, I should say about eleven or soon after. I didn't particularly notice."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No But naturally I assumed he was heading straight home, and I had every reason to suppose that was so "

Silver touched his iron-grey moustache with his fingers

"Did he seem quite normal then, sir?"

"Perfectly As a matter of fact he was in excellent spirits We had arranged to do a little fishing together next Saturday "

"You and Mr Cavendish are old friends, I believe?"

"That is so We were at school together twenty-five years ago I shouldn't take this too seriously, inspector He's sure to turn up very soon Unless, of course, he has met with some accident "

"We've made enquiries at the hospitals, but they've seen nothing of him "

'Wait a moment, didn't he say—yes, I think he told me his wife was away In Eastbourne, or somewhere like that "

"Mrs Cavendish came home last night unexpectedly, sir, and was very worried She rang us up at four this morning We have made exhaustive enquiries without success It was only this evening that the chief cashier remembered he'd overheard Mr Cavendish say something about going to dine with you last night "

"Well, it certainly does sound rather odd," commented Porlock

"Would you mind telling me just what happened last night, sir?"

"With pleasure I met him at my club at eight o'clock We dined and had a game of billiards Then we took a taxi to my flat "

"What time did you get to your flat, sir?"

"It must have been about ten "

"Had you any special reason for going there?"

"Yes I have some very fine old Napoleon brandy, and I wanted him to taste it "

"So he stayed at your home for just over an hour?"

"Something like that "

"Where were you when you said 'good-night' to him?"

"At the door of my flat "

"Then he went down in the lift alone?"

"No Actually, he didn't use the lift. He said he couldn't bother to wait for it "

"Did you leave the flat again, sir?"

"No I read for a while, and went to bed at about midnight "

The inspector's fingers strayed to his moustache again

"That all seems very clear," he said "You must have been the last person to see him "

"Apparently That is, with the exception of the night porter,

who generally sits in his little office in the hall I don't know whether he noticed Mr Cavendish go out, though "

"Thank you, sir We've got to make enquiries in a case like this Let's hope the gentleman will turn up, as you say, pretty soon "

"It certainly is queer Bank managers are such stolid, dependable people Perhaps he's lost his memory and wandered away One can't help feeling a little anxious "

II

ANOTHER day passed The newspapers printed a few cautious paragraphs, but did not display any violent interest in the matter because people vanish every day True, this was a bank manager, which made the thing more noteworthy Some publicity was obtained by means of a wireless S O S By the end of the week, however, other things had claimed the attention of the public, and the bank continued to function perfectly with the assistant manager temporarily at the helm

At the end of a month everybody, excepting those who knew Mr Cavendish personally, had forgotten all about his disappearance, and Mrs Cavendish began to assume that she had, in some inexplicable fashion, become a widow

Mr David Porlock, who was a gentleman of leisure, decided to spend a few weeks in Paris, this being the month of June when the gay city was at its best All his luggage was deposited in the cloakroom at Victoria station Then he did one or two little errands, and called in at the club for luncheon, but before he had tasted the delicate sole that was set before him, a waiter presented him with a card bearing the name of Detective Inspector Silver

Glancing at his luncheon, Mr Porlock frowned slightly

"Tell him I'll be down presently," he told the waiter, and picked up his knife and fork When, in due course, he descended, the detective was waiting patiently

"What is it now, inspector?" asked the clubman with superficial amiability "I can't stay very long as I'm leaving for Paris to-day "

"It's about that business of Mr Cavendish again, sir We've still got it on our books "

"Oh yes, of course Once you fellows get your teeth into a thing you never let go, do you?"

"Not if we can help it And this case has never been explained to our satisfaction "

"I'm afraid he must have lost his memory "

"You might think so, in a way, sir," said Silver, "but his

doctor can't see it in that light Says he'd have thought the last man in the world to suffer from amnesia was Mr Cavendish "

"Then I give it up," mused the clubman, in a slightly perplexed fashion "

"But that's what we never do "

"Well, what did you wish to see me about? I can only give you a few minutes "

The stolid inspector fingered his iron-grey moustache

"I'm sorry, sir, but we can't hurry a thing like this There are one or two points I should like to take up with you again, if you don't mind I've got my notes here of what you said on the day after Mr Cavendish disappeared "

"There is obviously nothing I can add to what I said then "

"Maybe not, sir But all the same, even if it's only a matter of routine, I've got to carry on Now, I see you said that you arrived at your flat with Mr Cavendish at ten o'clock at night, and you did not go out again?"

Porlock gave a little laugh

"Yes, but this is all ancient history I assure you——"

"How long are you going away for, sir?"

"Oh, a month or possibly six weeks It depends what I find to do in Paris "

"May I ask what luggage you're taking?"

Mr Porlock, a man of some dignity, looked faintly surprised

"I don't quite see how that can possibly concern Scotland Yard, but if you really wish to know, I have no objection to explaining "

"I'd like you to, sir," replied Silver, stolid as ever

"Let me see, there's a trunk, a suit-case and an attache-case New, *why* on earth did you want to know?"

"No special reason, sir, excepting that, as you put it, once we get our teeth into a job, we keep them there Some day we may find out what happened to Mr Cavendish, but until then we can't afford to leave any stone unturned "

"Highly commendable, but I'm afraid I can't help you any more If you'll excuse me, inspector——"

"Excuse *me*, sir There are one or two stones that we haven't quite finished turning over yet If you'll give me your help for a little while, I'll soon mop this up, and then you'll be able to go away and forget all about the matter Just as a formality, would you be so kind as to tell me where your luggage is?"

"Certainly In the cloakroom at Victoria Station But isn't all this rather ridiculous?"

"Where the question of a man's life is at stake, sir, we have to do all kinds of things, whether they look ridiculous to other

people or not. There's no reason why you shouldn't answer my question, I suppose?"

"None at all, excepting that it seems a waste of time."

"And you wouldn't mind accompanying me to Victoria Station?"

"Not if you wish," said Mr Porlock. "But I still don't see your point."

"Just routine, sir," murmured the inspector. "There's a lot of that in police work. Some folks get their backs up when we have to ask questions, but it doesn't make any difference to us, though we try not to irritate people more than we can help. Shall we go, sir?"

Porlock's shoulders moved slightly. Then he agreed.

"Now, sir," said the inspector when they reached Victoria, "I'd like to see your things, please. You've got a cloakroom ticket?"

With a weary smile, Porlock handed it to the inspector.

"There you are," he said, "and if you would like to see inside the baggage, here are the keys. I don't know what you expect to find, but don't disarrange my clothes more than you can help."

Almost apologetically, Silver unfastened the lock of the trunk and, after a cursory glance within, closed it again.

"That's all right, sir," he said. "No ill feeling, I hope."

"Not the slightest," replied Mr Porlock, quite amiably. "Now tell me why you wanted to look inside my trunk?"

"Just to see what there was in it, sir," was the bland reply.

"Well, are you satisfied?"

"Naturally I can believe the evidence of my own eyes," Silver gave a gentle tug at his moustache. "By the way, sir, you haven't any more luggage?"

"Heavens, man! How much do you think one wants to take to Paris for a month?"

"But are these the only things that were taken from your flat this morning?"

"What are you getting at, inspector?"

"I should just like an answer to my question, sir, if it's all the same to you."

"These are the only things that I'm taking to Paris."

"I asked if these are the only things that were taken from your flat this morning."

"Of course."

For a fraction of a second there was an ominous glitter in Silver's eyes.

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite."

"Only one trunk and these two cases?"

"That is so "

"I should like you to think again and be certain about your answer, Mr Porlock "

"I am not in the habit of making mis-statements, inspector," was the steady reply

"I see Then in this case it must be that you have forgotten "

"Forgotten what?"

"I am told that you brought two trunks from your flat to this cloakroom "

Mr Porlock's eyes narrowed thoughtfully for a moment

"You're quite right, inspector," he said "I'm terribly sorry, but you're getting me quite confused with all this cross-examination There *was* another case It contains a number of somewhat valuable articles—trophies and so on, which I never care to leave in the flat when I go away Until you mentioned it I had absolutely forgotten "

"I understand, sir Very natural, too, just when you're in the middle of going away Where did you leave that other case?"

"In the strong room at my bank They always keep it there for me "

"I suppose you wouldn't mind me having a peep inside that too, would you?"

"Not at all Here, take the key I shan't want it until I come back Good-bye, inspector Scotland Yard certainly is persistent However, I suppose you have to be I must go now "

There was a slightly more alert air about Silver

"I'm afraid that doesn't quite finish the routine, sir I'd like you to accompany me to the bank "

"What on earth for? I should miss my train "

"Just the same, sir, I must ask you to go to the bank with me "

Porlock's dignity peeped out again

"Aren't you rather exceeding your duty, inspector? I don't mind falling in with your wishes up to a point, but I have made definite plans about going away and——"

"I can't help that, sir I'm only doing my duty, and I can't allow any one's plans to interfere "

Porlock appeared to waver for a few seconds

"Oh, well," he said at last "It's a damned nuisance, but if you insist I suppose I must "

"That's the spirit, sir," replied Silver "It won't take long in a taxi."

They walked out into the station yard and engaged a cab

"One moment," said Porlock before stepping into it "I want some cigarettes "

"Funny thing, so do I," said Silver

Ten seconds later Porlock thrust out his leg to trip the detective up, and darted away like a trout, but Silver, recovering his balance quickly, was after him. The chase was brief, and after a short struggle a band of metal was securely placed round the clubman's wrist.

"Just to make quite sure, you know," said Silver. "Now, if you don't mind, we'll be moving on to the bank."

Mr Porlock sighed as their taxi slid through the traffic.

"The boulevards of Paris are beautiful in June," he said.

"So I've always heard," remarked the CID man. "I was thinking of taking my wife over there when I go on my holidays shortly."

The cab was held up at traffic lights.

"I suppose there really is no chance of my seeing Paris again," mused Mr Porlock.

"Not if that case at the bank contains what I think it does."

"I wonder if you could oblige me with a cigarette?"

"Sorry. I never carry them. I don't smoke."

Mr Porlock looked at him oddly.

"Then you knew all the time?"

"I had a pretty good idea."

"You intrigue me, inspector. I didn't see how anybody on earth could find out. I was flattering myself that I had committed a perfect crime. How did you get on to it?"

"Just routine," remarked Silver.

"You're very modest. You must have a touch of genius."

"Genius? Well, we don't go in much for that at the Yard, sir. We've no time for fancy tricks. We generally get there though, by plodding on."

"I must have made a mistake somewhere. Won't you satisfy my curiosity?"

"If it's any satisfaction to you, sir, I'll say you did a pretty neat job of work. Why did you kill Cavendish? We like to find a motive and then work backwards, but in this case——"

"The motive was my secret, inspector. Cavendish was the only man alive who might have stumbled on something which would have ended in my being sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. He never really suspected how near he was to the truth, but there was danger. With him out of the way, I was safe, and, but for your persistence, he would have remained hermetically sealed up in that case in the strong room of his own bank for an indefinite period. Banks never interfere with anything stowed away in their strong room. It was Mr Cavendish himself who put me on to the neat idea. In six months or so, when the whole thing had been more or less forgotten, I intended to remove the case and dispose

of it at leisure. The situation seemed fool-proof to me. Where did I make a slip?"

"To be quite fair," said Silver in matter-of-fact tones, "I don't think you made a slip at all—that is not one which you could have anticipated."

"My manner was quite natural when you first questioned me?"

"Very convincing. It's a miracle you didn't get away with the whole thing, only, as I say, we keep plodding on, and, sooner or later, run up against some queer little thing. It may lead nowhere, but we track it down, just in case."

"And what was the queer little thing that led to my Waterloo?"

"Well, first of all, you got Mr Cavendish up into your flat and gave him a glass of old Napoleon brandy. And while he was tasting it—mind you, this is only my surmise—you knocked him on the head."

"That happens to be perfectly correct."

"It seemed probable, anyway. Then you finished him off and put him into the case which had been stored many times already in the strong room of the bank. The clerks, therefore, would accept it again as a matter of habit."

"Why not?"

"Quite so. But you knew there was a night porter on duty at the flats where you lived. He had seen you and Mr Cavendish go in. You felt you would be doubly safe if Milligan, the night porter, could see him walk out again."

"Please go on."

"You and Mr Cavendish were somewhat alike. You were about the same height and there was a certain facial resemblance, excepting that he wore a moustache and you were clean shaven. Finally he wore gold-rimmed spectacles and you don't. You put on his spectacles and a false moustache which you had carefully prepared beforehand, and you made your eyebrows bushy like his. You thought it would be too risky to descend in the lift with Milligan, so you walked down the steps and passed out into the street, disguised as Mr Cavendish, wearing his hat and overcoat."

"That is perfectly true," remarked Mr Porlock, "and, as far as I am aware, it worked. Afterwards, I put the hat and a few stones into the pockets of the overcoat, and threw it into the Thames, thinking that it would sink."

"You were probably right," agreed Silver.

"And I returned to the flat again at about four o'clock in the morning, knowing that the night porter would, as usual, be dozing in his chair then. I'm certain he didn't see me, and, anyhow, I often return to the flat very late."

"Milligan didn't see you come in again, Mr Porlock "

"Then I fail to see where I tripped up "

"I'm not surprised," remarked the CID man "I didn't get on to it myself until long afterwards As far as we knew, the night porter was the last man to have seen Mr Cavendish alive For that reason I talked to him on several occasions In the end he mentioned a curious thing which he didn't think important He is not a particularly observant person, but he has a trick of noticing people's hands Personally I glance at their feet we're all different in that respect Milligan said that as 'Mr Cavendish' walked out he caught sight of the man's hands, and observed that they were like yours Long, slender fingers and so forth—quite the artistic type This provided me with one more stone to overturn I found that Mr Cavendish had broad, stumpy hands, and then I knew I'd struck something "

"When was that "

"Yesterday afternoon From then on I had you kept under close observation We had no means of knowing what you might have done with the body I hardly thought you still had it in the flat, though I was going to make a search there If you'd removed the trunks a few days earlier we might never have got at the truth But our man saw them go out this morning, and after that—well, it was just a matter of routine "

THE CASE OF JACOB HEYLYN

By

LEONARD R GRIBBLE

No 37 Elmwood Avenue was a moderate-sized detached house, stucco-fronted, with small leaded windows and an air of aloofness. A screen of unkempt conifers hid it from the gaze of passers-by, and few were they whose business led them through its black iron gate and along the moss-grown crazy path that stretched beyond.

When Detective-Inspector Anthony Slade first saw it, on a bright April morning, a uniformed policeman stood guard by the gate.

"Is Inspector Jarrod inside, constable? I'm from the Yard."

The policeman saluted smartly. "Yes, sir. Inspector Slade? He's expecting you, sir."

The gate was pushed open and Slade passed through, his keen grey eyes narrowing as his gaze travelled over the drab exterior, the neglected paintwork, and the untrimmed lawns. He was about to ring when the front door swung open, and confronting him was a man with whom he had worked before.

"Hallo, Jarrod," said the Yard man. "Like old times, seeing you."

Divisional-Inspector Jarrod grunted and closed the door after the other.

"Well, I don't think it'll be for long, Slade. About the plainest case of suicide I've struck. No real need for dragging you out."

Jarrod sounded as morose as ever. Slade smiled to himself as he took off his overcoat.

"Who is he?" he asked, picking up his green leather attaché-case and following the other along the hall.

"Old boy named Heylyn. Reputed to be bit of a miser, though I can't vouch for that. Anyway, it's generally accepted that he was eccentric. Well, his troubles are over. There he is."

Jarrod opened a door and pointed to a figure lying in the centre of what apparently had been a drawing-room and study combined. Shelves of books lined one wall, against that opposite was an oak table, and in one corner by the fireplace was an oak bureau. There were two leather-covered arm-chairs and one other chair in the room.

"Bachelor, then," commented Slade.

"We don't know of any family Meet Hepple, our divisional surgeon A comparatively new man"

Divisional-Surgeon Francis Hepple, a lean, lantern-jawed man, rose from one of the arm-chairs and offered his hand

"Pleased to meet you, inspector," he nodded "I suppose Jarrod's already told you—plain case of suicide Clean drill through the roof of his mouth"

Slade bent over the body of the dead man The mouth and chin were stained dark with blood, and there was dried blood on the under cheek and a large stain on the worn carpet The fingers of the right hand were spread claw-like by the crooked knees A couple of feet away from the grisly head lay an automatic

Slade turned his head "Powder-marks in the mouth, doctor?" he asked Hepple

The latter, who stood legs apart leaning against the mantelpiece, nodded

"He must have bitten the barrel hard, for the angle is pretty low," he explained "Been dead about eleven or twelve hours, I should say, when I first saw him"

"The light was on when we found him," added Jarrod

Slade looked up The electric bowl-light was immediately over the body

"Queer place to shoot himself, under the light Come to that, strange that he should have the light on at all," he remarked.

Jarrod shrugged, and wrinkles appeared between his pale brown eyes "Afraid of the dark, Slade You know what it is when you reach that pitch"

Slade nodded, his gaze thoughtful "Yes, I suppose that was it" The dead man was not a pretty sight His thin crop of grey hair was matted with blood, and his shrunken form was hunched into an attitude almost suggestive of fear. The eyes were open, and in them was a fixed glassy stare as of surprise The aquiline nose shone with a faint moisture, and a similar dampness covered the white tapering forehead The clothes were old and shabby with long wear, and the heelless carpet slippers covering the feet did not conceal several holes in the dark blue socks

Slade rose "Right, doctor Clean him up, then I'll come back" He turned to Jarrod, who was still frowning. "Who found him?"

"We did But the woman who came here each day and tidied up the place couldn't get an answer to her ring, so she came along to the station I've got her in the next room You'd better see her Name of Carter—a widow"

Mrs Carter was a small, plump little body with two large staring eyes that seemed permanently to register amazement The rather high-crowned black hat she wore revealed wisps of smoky-grey hair, her eyebrows were straight and angular, lending a somewhat

comical expression to a face that was generally serious; a darkish brown coat of nondescript cut completely hid her figure, and, for the rest, heavy black brogues and black cotton gloves were the most salient features about her. When Slade and Jarrod entered the room where she sat gingerly poised on the edge of a chair she was eyeing suspiciously the bulk of the latter's right-hand man, Sergeant Waites.

The sergeant saluted when he saw Slade, and the Yard man nodded "Hallo, sergeant. Keeping fit, I see."

"Yes, thanks, sir," Waites threw his superior a conspiratorial glance, but Jarrod's attention was elsewhere.

"Mrs. Carter, this is Inspector Slade, of Scotland Yard. He has a few questions to ask you."

"Dearie me!" exclaimed the little woman. "Scotland Yard—oh, my!" She bobbed a brief curtsy.

"Please be seated, Mrs. Carter," said the Yard man, smiling genially as the woman stood up. "Thank you. Now, you looked after this house for Mr. Heylyn, didn't you?"

"That's right, sir. I came 'ere 'alf-past eight each mornin' 'cept Sundays, tidied up an' cooked 'im somethin' for midday."

"And when did you usually leave?"

"'Bout one o'clock, after I'd washed up. Though sometimes on Saturdays I'd stop on to about two."

"Mr. Heylyn was never out in the morning, then?"

"Him?" She sounded surprised at the question. "Why, he never went anywhere. But, then, misers never do, do they, sir?" She looked suddenly knowing.

Slade smiled. "So Mr. Heylyn was a miser, Mrs. Carter?"

"Why, everybody knows that much, sir!" Her tone conveyed astonishment at Scotland Yard's lack of information. "Never went anywhere, never did anything, and was allus grumbling about the cost of things. Then, too, he never let me in that room"—she pointed to the partitioning wall and shuddered visibly—"when he had that there safe open."

"I see. How long have you been coming here, Mrs. Carter?"

"About two years now, sir. I came soon after 'e 'ad the telephone put in. Answered an advert in the paper. But 'e was a most particular man, Mr. Heylyn was. Would 'ave everything just as 'e thought, and things must be done just to the tick o' the clock, too. Fair taskmaster in 'is own way—only I got used to 'im, of course!"

"He never mentioned his private affairs to you? Never became confidential at all? He was a lonely man, you know?"

The black cotton gloves were flourished disdainfully.

"It was as much as I could get to have him say a straight 'yes'."

or 'no,' sir Sometimes he was that there grumpy that I was in two minds about givin' me notice "

Slade had to take his questions as answered

"Can you say whether Mr Heylyn has been more moody lately, Mrs Carter?"

The little woman screwed up her face in an effort of concentration

"Well, p'raps he was until a few days ago, when 'e 'ad Dr Bell call," she admitted finally

"So he's been having a doctor?"

"Dr Bell came twice, as I remember, the last time was two days ago, sir "

"Did Mr Heylyn have much correspondence? I mean, did many letters come for him?"

"I don't know, sir The first morning post had come by the time I arrived, and he never had much second post 'cept open letters with ha'penny stamps on 'em, bills and such-like "

Slade asked Mrs Carter to be kind enough to wait a little while longer, and then he followed Jarrod into the hall

"Well?" demanded the latter

The Yard man shrugged "It's plain how the miser idea has got about, Jarrod But it's certainly strange that such a man should do away with himself—unless he were afraid of something Living alone, he may have got illusions, of course But this Dr Bell should be able to clear that much up "

The door of the drawing-room opened and Hepple appeared, rolling up a stained towel

"I've propped him up in one of the arm-chairs," he explained brusquely

Slade and Jarrod re-entered the room The washed face of the dead man was of a pale putty colour, and at the left corner of the lined mouth was a hairy wart The bandage which held the jaw in place caused the thin lips to spread in an unpleasant pout In a saucer on the table was a set of false teeth Slade glanced at them The plate of the upper row had been splintered by the bullet, and powder-marks were visible on it Beside the saucer was a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles

"We found 'em on the floor alongside the body," said Jarrod

The Yard man went through the pockets of the dead man's clothes, and removed a pocket-wallet, some loose change, and a bunch of keys From the wallet he extracted a letter It was from Dr Bell, containing a brief note to the effect that the writer was sorry that he was unable to call the next morning, as arranged, but would arrive at the usual time the following morning

"So Bell will be along this morning," said Slade "That makes things easier We'll finish by lunch-time "

"Good!" said Jarrod, in the tone of one who means what he says

Slade crossed to a wall safe that was hidden by a thick brown curtain draping one side of the door, as though to exclude any draught. After trying several keys he found one that unlocked the metal door.

"Why, hallo, Jarrod!" he exclaimed "This affair's empty"

"Empty?" Jarrod strode across the room and peered over the Yard man's shoulder "H'm! Looks as though that's the reason for the shooting. What do you say?"

"Maybe" Slade's tone was non-committal. He crossed to the bureau and unlocked the leaf. For several minutes he rummaged through the drawers and pigeon-holes. "Nothing here except this," he said at last, holding up a bank pass-book, "but there's not much to his credit. Fifty odd pounds, that's all."

"What bank?" asked Jarrod.

"London and Northern Counties. Be as well to get through to 'em on the phone."

"Right. I will." Jarrod left the room.

Slade straightened his back and looked round the room. Against one side of the mantelpiece was a letter-rack. He went through its contents, finding nothing save bills and receipts. He replaced them and picked up the automatic, which had been placed on the mantelpiece, holding it by the end of the barrel. Then his eye caught something protruding from under a vase, a slip of paste-board. He picked it up and read the inscription.

*Mrs W N Kemp
34 Cadogan Park, W 2*

He was still looking at it when Jarrod came back.

"Manager says Heylyn hasn't had much to his credit for over five years," he said. "Just about that time ago he drew out quite a sum—several thousands, as a matter of fact—and some valuable securities they had held for him. Had got a sudden notion that he wanted to take care of his dibs himself. I suppose that's when the safe was put in. Anyway, now I recall that he was registered for a gun. What's that you've got? Oh, I see, that visiting-card! Yes, that's the woman in the case, I suppose." Jarrod laughed, but his habitual morose expression returned the next instant. "As a matter of fact, Tadman—the chap you saw at the gate—saw her leave here last night. Round about half-past nine."

Slade shot the other a swift glance.

"That was about the time of the—suicide."

His pause before the word "suicide" was significant. The eyes of the two men met, and Jarrod scowled as he realised that for

an instant the same thought had passed through the minds of both "Must have been before," he contended doggedly "That's obvious You don't go and commit suicide in front of a lady visitor—even if you're as unsociable as Jacob Heylyn "

Slade stared long and hard at the unsightly face of the dead man

"You're convinced it was suicide, Jarrod?" he asked softly

The other stared

"What—— Why, what the dickens are you driving at, Slade?"

Jarrod frowned so that his brows knit across his nose "Of course it's suicide! Ever known any one let somebody else stick a loaded gun into his mouth without protesting? Surely you're not thinking that woman—what's her name?—Mrs Kemp—wheedled him into letting her doing—*that*?"

Jarrod laughed, but without mirth

"The safe's empty," Slade pointed out

The other's frown returned "Yes—true And—er—Tadman says the woman was carrying an attaché-case, a larger one than yours Still, if it's suicide——"

"That may have been because he had been robbed "

Jarrod shook his head vigorously "No See that card? Well, Heylyn let her in If she'd been up to anything shady she wouldn't have left that card where I found it—on this table "

Slade was silent for a few moments "Let's have Tadman in," he said at last

But he got nothing else out of the constable At about half-past nine on the previous evening, as he was strolling past No 37 on his beat, the gate had opened and a woman had come out, carrying a large attaché-case The moon had been bright, and he had turned to look at her, but her back was towards him She crossed the road, and hastened along in the opposite direction She had been dressed in a dark brown fur coat, with a small dark hat Asked by Slade, he said no, there had been no light shining in the front of the house

When Tadman had left Slade turned to Jarrod and remarked, "I don't think we need keep Hepple hanging about any longer, if he goes now he can get his report in early this afternoon "

"I'll go and tell him," said the other

Left alone, Slade began to pace the room, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets His keen, sharp-cut features were settled in a frown Here was a puzzle with one or two loose threads He stopped to glance at the dead man again It would be a waste of time, he knew, testing the butt of the automatic for fingerprints If any prints were on it they would be those of the dead man Suddenly a fresh thought crossed his mind He stood still, pondering, and when, a moment later, Jarrod returned he said, "It'd be as well if you got through to the station and asked them to look

up the number and make of the gun registered in Heylyn's name "Jarrod's mouth twisted, and his chin sank on to the stiff serge collar of his inspector's jacket

"What's the idea, Slade?" he demanded, a shade suspiciously

"Get me those facts and I'll tell you, Jarrod," replied the Yard man quietly

Jarrod grunted "As close as ever, Slade Well"—he turned to the door again—"I reckon I'll know my way to that telephone by the time you've run out of ideas"

When he came back Slade was sitting on the edge of the table, looking down at the automatic

"Well?" asked the C.I.D. man, smiling, for he saw the frown on the other's face

"All right," growled Jarrod, "you win The gun registered to him was a revolver, Colt pattern, number"—here he consulted a slip of paper in his hand—"M 8962 An old-type gun, not made any longer"

"D'you see this?" Slade pointed to the upper side of the automatic Jarrod bent over it "The number of this has been filed off Begins to look, Jarrod, as though some one's been having ideas—and very bright ideas, too"

Jarrod straightened his back and fingered his jaw, which seemed on the point of being dislocated

"He may have got a new gun, of course," he ventured, but his tone was timid, it was a manifest quibble

Slade's head shook "A man who's been in the habit of owning a gun lawfully, Jarrod, doesn't suddenly get a new one and keep it secret If that"—he pointed to the automatic—"was Heylyn's automatic it would be registered And the old gun is still registered under his name—he paid his licence when it was last due?"

"That's so," admitted the other reluctantly

"Then that Colt should still be here, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Jarrod, taking care to avoid Slade's glance

"Unless the person who shot Heylyn took it away!"

Jarrod spun round on his heel

"Then you mean, Slade, you think this"—he thrust out an arm in the direction of the dead man—"is murder!"

Slade shrugged and slid from the table

"My eyes tell me it's suicide, Jarrod, but my reason says no, it's murder"

But the other was not relinquishing the stand he had taken without a final attempt to retain it

"But do you mean to tell me, Slade, that any man in his right senses would let some one ram a gun into his mouth and blow a

hole through his head? Why, it's damned silly! If your reason tells you that, then it's a——"

"Quite. But my reason doesn't tell me anything of the sort."

"Why, what are you driving at, man?"

"I'm only trying to tell you my reason *won't* admit of a sane man allowing some one to push a gun into his mouth and stand quiet while he pulls the trigger."

"Then what is it? D'you think he was doped, and then——"

"No. Hepple would have stumbled across that, unless the drug had been administered subcutaneously, and his hands and head are free of any needle puncture. I've looked. They were the only parts of the body exposed, and a needle stabbing through the thick texture of that jacket would most likely break."

Jarrold was heavily sarcastic. Not that Slade minded, he realised that for the most part Jarrold's manner was pose.

"You're keeping up the Yard tradition, Slade. This is all very subtle, but you're letting your reason contradict itself. First it tells you it's murder, then it tells you that it couldn't have been. That's too bad!"

The Yard man grinned at the other's scowling face.

"I admit it looks that way, Jarrold. But the contradiction is not a deliberate one——"

"Look here, Slade, if you're raising your reason on to an ethical plane, I'm climbing down to the practical. We can't have this corpse here all day. I'll ring up the hospital. They'll have to send an ambulance to take it along to the mortuary."

"Don't forget Bell's coming. He may be able to help us."

"Doubt it. But we can wait till he's been. I'll get through now."

Jarrold left, and once more Slade was left on his own. No sooner had the door shut on the other than the smile left his face, replaced by a puzzled frown. He picked up the visiting-card, but finally put it down, shaking his head. With his handkerchief he unfastened the clip of the magazine in the automatic, but that was in order. One particularly harassing question was troubling him, clamouring for an answer. If this was murder, why hadn't Heylyn been shot with his own gun? The only logical explanation to this seemed to be that the Colt had been locked up somewhere, and that the murderer had not been able to get it until the keys had been taken from the dead man's pocket.

The revolver would not have been kept in the safe. In that room there remained the bureau. As likely a place as any. But where was the gun now? To take the revolver away would have been risking something, and from appearances the element of risk in this case had been reduced to the lowest possible. Presumably the murderer knew the safe was in that room, and the revolver was found in the bureau, so that to have gone upstairs to hide it would

have been illogical. The chances were that it was hidden, then, either in this room or that next to it.

Slade looked round the room searchingly. Then all at once he got down on his knees by the grate. There was no ash in the bottom, so there had been no fire, presumably, for some days. That was a point, anyway, that Mrs. Carter could settle satisfactorily. But on one or two of the bars were some particles of soot. Of course, the wind might have—

Slade stood up, took his jacket off, and rolled up his right shirt-sleeve. He stepped inside the fender and groped up the chimney with his hand. At first he felt nothing save stone wall. But when he stood on tiptoe his fingers curved over a ledge. Holding the mantelpiece with his left hand, he stepped on to the bars of the grate. The extra lift allowed his fingers to close over something cold and familiar in shape. He stepped down, and stared with narrowed eyes at the soot-smear on the Colt in his hand. His head jerked, and his gaze travelled to the still face of the corpse. What was the secret of that room?

His brain worked fast, and he had to make a rapid decision. Characteristically, he made it. Stepping into the fender, he replaced the gun on the shelf in the chimney where he had found it, then, dropping to his knees again, he carefully blew the soot his hand had deposited between the bars, removing any trace of his movements. Quickly he hastened out of the room and made his way into the kitchen at the rear, where he washed his hands. Fortunately Jarrod had gone into the other room to speak to Waites, and so he was not seen. When he returned to the drawing-room he slipped on his jacket and turned his attention to the bureau.

The drawers and pigeon-holes he had already scrutinised, without discovering anything of interest. He went through their contents again, but the notes and old letters he sorted over offered nothing in the nature of a clue to what had taken place on the previous night. There was nothing in the bureau to show that Jacob Heylyn had known Mrs. W. N. Kemp—which was peculiar. From Mrs. Carter's story he had gathered that Heylyn had been a lonely man, a man with, perhaps, an odd idea regarding the safety of his possessions. "eccentric" had been Jarrod's description, "miser" had been Mrs. Carter's.

But who could Mrs. Kemp be? Her card was left on the table by the body, she had almost run into a policeman when leaving the house—yet Heylyn customarily never received visitors. Was she a relation? She had left with a large attaché-case. Had she come to rob the old man of his wealth? Had she murdered him? But, if the latter, how had she contrived to get the automatic so far into his mouth?

A score of such questions trickled through Slade's mind as he

pored over the contents of that bureau, but at last he had to desist, his questions unanswered, his quest unrewarded

Jacob Heylyn *had* been murdered, he told himself The evidence of the two guns established so much Yes, he was on safe ground there But why— The money and securities in the safe yes, but how be sure that there were any there?

He couldn't, and that was a snag

He stared at the blotter that was fixed to the inside of the bureau leaf He took out the sheets and turned them over They were all clean save one in the centre, on which faint markings appeared in the bottom right-hand corner For a full moment he stared at those faint, blurred tracings of blue ink, wondering

He got rapidly to his feet and went to the next room, where Jarrod was discussing something with Waites, much to the obvious curiosity of the wide-eyed Mrs Carter

"Well, Slade, what is it?" asked Jarrod, glancing round at the other's entry

"I thought I remembered seeing a bottle of ink on that old writing-desk," said the Yard man, pointing to a far corner of the room "Ah, yes, and here are a couple of pens," he continued, bending over the article of furniture Suddenly he swung about "Do you know if Mr Heylyn ever used a fountain-pen, Mrs Carter?"

The little woman shook her head

"No, sir Whenever he signed anything for the tradesmen he allus comed in 'ere and did it at that there desk and with one o' those pens as you 'ave in your 'ands"

"I see Is there any other ink in the house, do you know?"

"Not as I knows of, sir, and I don't think it's likely there is You see, I got that bottle meself, from the stationer's next to the Underground"

"Thanks, Mrs Carter, that's what I wanted to know"

Jarrod followed Slade into the hall "What is it now?" he asked "Is that reason of yours working any better?"

Despite the almost surly tone there was a twinkle in his pale brown eyes, which Slade caught

"No, about the same, Jarrod As a matter of fact, it works better when quiet You know, without any disturbing influence around, or——"

"Oh, I know! You want me to keep my nose on my face for a little while Well, to tell the truth, I don't blame you, my boy" Jarrod's hand smote Slade's shoulder with more heartiness than the latter deemed necessary "Just let me know when that owl of a reason of yours wants to crow—I'll be along"

Slade grinned "Owls don't crow—they hoot," he pointed out Back in the drawing-room, with only the dead man as onlooker,

Slade took a powerful folding-lens from his case and seated himself at the bureau. The ink in the other room had been the common blue-black variety—that is, it wrote blue but dried black. The ink that had soaked into that single sheet of the blotter, however, had been blue—that is, it both wrote blue and dried out blue. And there was only that bottle of blue-black ink in the house.

Carefully Slade began to trace the formation of those blotted characters on the sheet of blotting-paper through his lens. After a couple of minutes' close scrutiny he had made out the following "rose H—d—ein." Of the small blots below these letters he could make out nothing legible.

For several moments he sat still, a new thought surging through his mind and slowly clarifying. He was brought to himself by the ringing of the front-door bell. Quickly he replaced the blotter as he had found it, and closed the leaf of the bureau. He went out into the hall to see Jarrod speaking to two men who bore a stretcher between them.

Even as Jarrod saw Slade another figure appeared in the open doorway, and both turned to regard the new-comer, a tall smartly dressed figure, with what was obviously a portable medicine-case in his hand.

The new-comer paused, for a moment at a loss. He glanced at the stretcher and then at Jarrod inquiringly.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I'm afraid I don't understand. I've come to see my patient, Mr. Heylyn, by appointment——"

"Mr. Heylyn's dead," said Jarrod in his brusquest manner. "I take it you're Dr. Bell?"

"I'm Henry Bell—yes. But what is this? Heylyn dead? I don't quite follow. He was run down, out of sorts, but his health wasn't in any real danger——"

"I'm afraid Mr. Heylyn's death was rather violent, doctor," said Jarrod crisply. "He was shot through the mouth."

Dr. Bell's brows lifted, and he whistled softly.

"So that's it! Through the mouth—eh? Suicide!" He took a deep breath, and his broad shoulders slumped. "Poor old man! I warned him against depression, but never thought—didn't dream——"

"Doubtless you'd like to see the body, doctor?" put in Slade.

"Well, yes, though I see you're ready to carry him off. Will you gentlemen require a certificate from me?"

Dr. Bell's interest had turned into channels purely professional. "Divisional-Surgeon Hepple will see you about that, doctor. The body's in the drawing-room. Come this way." Jarrod glanced at the two hospital men. "You'd better come along."

When they had passed into the drawing-room Slade picked up the telephone directory and turned to section H. In a few seconds

he had found the name he wanted, "Hardstein, Ambrose, Money-lender, 64 Bradbury Chambers, W 1" He dialled the number, and a few seconds later was speaking in an authoritative voice to Mr Hardstein himself, and there was something in what he said that made that silky-voiced financier wince. But Mr Hardstein did as he was told—he hurried. A few moments after replacing the receiver Slade was speaking to an assistant at a well-known public library, who was sent to look up an entry in a directory. The reply, when it came, was every whit as satisfying as Mr Hardstein's had been.

Slade made his way to the drawing-room, where the hospital men were securing the body to the stretcher. At last the gruesome task was done, and they bore out the remains of Jacob Heylyn. Slade turned to Jarrod.

"I want you to fix something with Mrs Carter for me, Jarrod. There's soot in that grate. I want to know when this chimney was last cleaned." Jarrod looked stupefied, but Slade caught him by the arm. "Come on, man, we haven't got all day. I'm sure Dr Bell will excuse us for a few minutes, won't you, doctor? There are just one or two things I want to ask you."

Dr Bell placed his medicine-case on the table, and sat down on the single hard chair.

"Just go ahead, gentlemen." He waved a hand. "My time's yours. This is all very upsetting. Dear me! Fancy—that Heylyn, that little mouse of a man, should go and do a thing like— It's well-nigh incredible!"

He seemed genuinely bewildered by the tragedy into which he had stepped.

"And to think I specially put off seeing him yesterday, to come to-day and find—this!"

He shook his head sadly, and Slade hastened Jarrod out of the room. As soon as they were in the hall Jarrod turned round, and his protest was bitter.

"Here, what's this tomfoolery about knowing when the sweep last came? Are you imagining the sweep pulled this trick?"

Slade placed a warning finger on his lips, at which Jarrod's scowl deepened, and when Slade placed his ear to the keyhole of the drawing-room door he looked about to explode. But before he could say anything Slade had quietly turned the handle and was opening the door. The next thing that Jarrod knew was Slade's leaping vault across the room. Standing on the hearth was Dr Bell, his back to the door. As the Yard man leaped he whirled round. There was a moment of surprised hesitation before he raised a blackened hand, and that moment undoubtedly saved the CID man's life. As the doctor pressed the trigger of the Colt Slade's

fist caught his wrist, and the bullet tore a hole through the plaster of the ceiling

A couple of minutes later Sergeant Waites snapped his handcuffs on the wrists of Jacob Heylyn's murderer.

Ninety minutes after Dr Henry Bell had been driven off in a taxicab in the custody of two plain-clothes men Slade lit his pipe and settled himself in the most comfortable chair in Divisional-Inspector Jarrod's office

"But I can't see how you came to suspect Bell in the first place" Jarrod was still marvelling at the result of the morning's investigation His scowl had temporarily lifted

"That letter first set me thinking," explained Slade "There was no envelope, and, as far as I could see, there was no special reason why that letter should be in his wallet, when all his others were in the rack Seems it was meant for us to see Now, the same prominence was given to 'Mrs Kemp's' card There was a point of coincidence—and a strange one That, naturally, set me thinking Mrs Kemp was seen to leave—in fact, considering the nature of her business at No 37, she was not at all careful It was almost as though she wanted to be seen—and by the surest person to remember, a policeman That was another point If we assumed Heylyn committed suicide, well and good, then Mrs Kemp didn't matter But if we suspected murder, very well, there was Mrs Kemp to hunt for That was ingenious, and it revealed a careful and intelligent brain at work But there was the question of the way Heylyn had been murdered"

"Ah!" exclaimed Jarrod "That's what wants explaining"

"Yet it was simple—really It meant that Heylyn must have voluntarily opened his mouth Now, what does a doctor generally want you to open your mouth for? To see your tongue! And, naturally, the best place would be under the light All this meant that a doctor had called on Heylyn that evening, and while pretending to look at his tongue had shoved that automatic in his mouth and pulled the trigger A pretty grisly way of murdering an old man, and it wanted nerve But Bell was in desperate straits He'd been gambling, and had borrowed money from Hardstein, a tough nut, Jarrod, who generally wants overweight with his pound of flesh The clue of the blotter put me on to Hardstein, and he himself told me the rest Bell was due to pay him four thousand five hundred pounds, with interest, by first post to-day That meant Bell had had to catch the last post yesterday So he addressed an envelope in the drawing-room, enclosing the money and a note addressed from his home In the bureau he found the Colt That was a snag He had to get rid of it, so hid it in the chimney, where I found it Then he relocked the bureau and the safe, placed

the keys in the old man's pocket, and slipped that letter announcing his calling to-day into the wallet

"He must have had some cards printed for that Mrs Kemp trick Anyway, he left one on the table And he'd brought a fur coat and a woman's hat in a large attaché-case These he donned putting his own things in the case If you follow his movements closely you'll probably find out he hailed a taxi at the top of Elmwood Avenue, after posting the letter to Hardstein, and, of course, he carried off the rest of what he had found in the safe

"It's plain," continued the Yard man, "that Bell had thought out the crime some days before, as he must have watched to see when Tadman passed the house on his beat That was a neat point In fact, the whole crime was neatly planned—it was so compact it deserved to succeed—well, almost! Another clever thing to remember was the light If inadvertently that had been switched out the whole show would have been given away, because Heylyn was lying under the lamp

"I suppose he got the idea when visiting the old man He doubtless knew his reputation, and chanced getting what he wanted in Treasury notes from the safe Yes, I think 'neat' is the right word, considering what a gamble it was actually "

There was a short silence

"But how did you really establish that Mrs Kemp was a fiction?" asked Jarrod

"I got some one on the phone to look up Cadogan Park in a London directory, and they couldn't find it . . . Oh yes, Jarrod," Slade added quickly, "and don't forget he was careful to file off the number of that automatic—another little indication of care But, of all his preparations, I hand him the palm for turning up in that self-assured way this morning, to see how things were shaping That was extra smart A clever actor, too Had he come half an hour sooner I doubt whether I should have suspected him——"

But all Jarrod said to that was "Bosh!"

Sir Jasper Slane

THE THIRTEENTH CARD

By

E PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

A LITTLE company of men, amongst whom was Jasper Slane, trooped out from the dining-room of the Lavender Club, and approached the broad staircase which led to the bridge rooms. The hall porter, who had been speaking on the telephone hurried over to them.

"Sir Jasper," he announced—"you are wanted on the telephone, sir."

Slane paused dubiously. Telephone calls at that hour of the evening were inopportune.

"Do you know who it is?" he asked.

"He didn't mention his name, sir," the man replied, "but I fancy that it was Lord Minchingham's voice. He said that it was an urgent matter."

"Put me in the table, and I'll play the next rubber," Slane begged his companions, with a little sigh of regret. "I don't know what the devil Minchingham wants with me at this time of the night."

He entered the telephone box and picked up the receiver.

"That you, Minchingham?" he inquired.

"Wizard!" was the brief response. "I say, Slane, are you doing anything very particular?"

"Well, I was just going to play bridge."

"So were we, but fate seems to have intervened. What I want to know is whether you can come round here, number 6a Cunningham Mansions, you know."

"Do you mean at once or later on?" Slane queried with a certain lack of enthusiasm in his tone.

"I mean this minute. Come in the quickest taxi you can find. Something has happened which we don't quite understand. I think you could help us. Awfully sorry and all that, but——"

"I will come," Slane promised.

He hung up the receiver, sent a regretful message upstairs, put on his hat and coat, found a taxi, and drove to Cunningham Mansions. The building in which the flat was situated was a comparatively small one. The ground floor was taken up by shops on each side, the first floor by offices, the second floor by a residential flat, and the third by Lord Minchingham's bijoux but famous

bachelor suite There was a slight air of disturbance, Slane noticed, in the entrance hall The commissioner was looking annoyed and the lift man distrait Slane, however, asked no questions, stepped into the lift, ascended to the third floor, was relieved of his coat and hat by Minchingham's perfect butler, and ushered at once into the library Minchingham, pale, with a high forehead, languid eyes, slim, debonair, but intensely lethargic, not from mannerism but from real disposition, rose to meet him. He had been seated at a card table, at which were two other men The fourth place was vacant

"Very good of you to come, Jasper," Minchingham said as he shook hands "You know these fellows, I think"

Slane nodded, and exchanged greetings with the other two men One was Goring Brett, who held a permanent post in the Foreign Office, the other was Sir Martin Phipps, a member of Parliament, chairman of many companies, and a well-known figure in the world of finance Even from the moment of his entrance there seemed to Slane to be something curious about that fourth and empty place

"What are you doing? Playing cut-throat?" he asked

"We are half afraid there is some one else who is doing that," Minchingham replied in his high-pitched, bored tone "We sat down to play a rubber of bridge three-quarters of an hour ago—we three and Cartwright You know Ronny Cartwright, of course?"

"Yes, I know Ronny," Slane admitted

"The cards had just been dealt, when Thomson, my butler, came in to say that some one wanted to speak to Cartwright on the telephone He apologised, and hurried away, carrying his cards and sorting them as he left the room The telephone is in the little hall smoking-room outside, as I dare say you know I am telling you all this rather carefully because we have so little to go on, and any trifle might give you an idea"

"Quite right"

"Well, we waited a minute or two," Minchingham continued, his drawl becoming more pronounced "We waited five minutes We waited nearly ten Then these fellows began to get the fidgets, and I went out Cartwright's cards were on the small table by the side of the telephone instrument The front door was open, but he himself had vanished I rang for Thomson Thomson knew nothing I looked round the flat—no sign of Cartwright I went downstairs to the commissioner He had been in his little office for the last three-quarters of an hour, and was sure that not a soul had entered or left the building The long and short of it is, Slane—it's a damned silly thing to say—but Ronny Cartwright has disappeared"

"Well, he can't have got very far," Slane observed with a smile.

"That should make the task simpler," Minchingham rejoined, "but all we ask is, find him for us. You know the geography of the place. The ground floor is let out in shops, which have been closed up for at least three hours. The floor above consists of offices, and they have been empty since seven o'clock. The floor above them, and immediately under this flat, is occupied by Princess Madziwill, a very wealthy Russian-Polish lady who keeps us in touch with the *haut monde*, inasmuch as even Buckingham Palace calls to see her. We two are the only tenants."

"Does Cartwright know the Princess?" Slane inquired.

"I am quite sure he doesn't, because only last time he was here he asked, curiously enough, who occupied the other flat. Rather got his eye on it for himself; I think, if there had been any chance of the lease falling in . . . Now, what about it, my friend Jasper? There's the ground floor, with its shops, and the first floor with locked doors, empty, my flat, which you can turn inside-out if you like, the Princess Madziwill's who, as I told you, is thoroughly well known, leads a very quiet life, and never goes out in the evening. I ask you, where is Ronny Cartwright?"

"We'll get to work in a moment," replied Jasper Slane, who was becoming more and more intrigued. "I hope you won't mind if I try a very short reconstruction."

He subsided into Cartwright's vacant place, helped himself to a cigarette, rose as though to obey a summons from Thomson, or from some one entering the room, and strolled out to the little hall where the telephone was placed. Upon the table by its side were the playing cards, which presumably Cartwright had laid down. He looked them over carefully. They were divided into suits, but there was something unfamiliar about them when spread out in his hand. He realised in a moment what it was. There were only twelve cards. He looked under the table, and upon the carpet—no sign of any other. He laid them down once more, and took the receiver from the telephone.

"Hullo!" he called out.

There was no reply. He spoke apparently into a well of silence. He tried again and again, pressed the hook down time after time. There was still no reply. He summoned Thomson.

"Thomson, is this the telephone that rang when you fetched Mr. Cartwright?" he inquired.

"Certainly, sir," the man replied. "There is no other in the flat, except an extension to this one, which rings into his lordship's bedroom."

"Do you mind," Slane asked, "seeing whether the extension is in order?"

"Certainly, Sir Jasper."

The man went out and reappeared a few minutes later.

"I cannot get any connection, sir," he confided "It seems as though we were cut off somewhere"

Slane nodded

"Your telephone has been tampered with," he announced "I can't think how his lordship got through to me"

"His lordship spoke from the hall, Sir Jasper," Thomson explained "He was downstairs questioning the commissioner"

"You are sure that Mr Cartwright replied up here?"

"Quite sure, Sir Jasper I heard his voice distinctly"

"You couldn't hear what he said?"

"I didn't listen, sir," was the somewhat reproachful rejoinder

"That's all right," Slane persisted, "but this is rather a serious affair His lordship tells me that Mr Cartwright has disappeared We want to find him If we could discover who he was talking with, it might help"

"I am sorry, sir, but I really didn't hear a word"

"Did Mr Cartwright seem disturbed at all?"

"I couldn't answer for that either, Sir Jasper I was busy clearing away in the dining-room His lordship likes the drinks in the library early I only know that I heard Mr Cartwright's voice speaking, and that about two minutes afterwards, when I came through the hall, there was no one there, and his cards were upon the table"

"What about his coat and hat?"

"They are both here, sir, and if I might venture to point out something, he certainly wouldn't attempt to leave the building without them It's a cold night, and snowing hard"

"Good," Slane murmured "It's always as well to start with some definite premise Mr Cartwright is still in the building Ergo, if we search the building we will find him"

"Well, what about it?" Minchingham asked as Slane re-entered the room

"You are right," the latter acknowledged "Ronny Cartwright has disappeared, apparently, in the full, dramatic sense of the word His hat and coat are in the hall, his cards are still upon the little table, and your telephone has been cut"

They all glanced at one another uncomfortably

"Look here," Goring Brett observed, "miracles don't happen nowadays There must be some quite ordinary explanation of this"

"There most probably is," Slane agreed "Let's set to work to discover it I suggest, Minchingham, that you three search this flat thoroughly Whilst you do that, I'll go and have a word with the commissioner, and tackle the Princess afterwards if necessary"

"That goes," Minchingham assented. "Come along, you fellows"

The commissioner proved to be a person whom it was impossible to suspect of either inattention to his duties or conspiracy in any shape or form. He was a tall, burly fellow, an ex-non-commissioned officer in the Guards, with a formidable row of medals, and a convincing alertness of manner. He declared, with emphasis and without reserve, that since the entrance of the three bridge guests, no stranger of any sort whatever had arrived at, or left, the flats. The lift-man was equally certain that he had not been summoned since he had taken the three gentlemen up to the card party, nor had he left his post, except to bring Lord Minchingham down to question the commissioner. Accompanied by the latter, Slane mounted to the first floor and examined the entrance to each of the various offices. There were no lights burning in any one of them, and the fastening of every lock was secure. Slane descended to the ground floor again with the commissioner.

"What sort of people are these tenants?" Slane asked. "Respectable lot, eh?"

"They wouldn't be here if they weren't, sir," the man replied confidently. "There's Mr Hubble, the lawyer. He's got the best suite. I saw him leave early this evening. His articled clerk wasn't long after him, and his two other clerks and office boy were gone by six o'clock. Then there's a Mr Simpson—an American film agent. He's been here three years. Him and his young lady typist, they left together somewhere about seven. Then there's another lawyer, a Mr Swayles, and Mr Michael—he's a kind of collector of rare furs and Oriental bric-à-brac. There wasn't one of them, sir, who didn't have to produce pretty good references before he got a foothold here."

"I see," Slane murmured. "Then the only two residential flats are Lord Minchingham's and the one below. Now tell me about the tenants there."

"It's a widowed lady, sir," the commissioner confided, his tone and manner becoming deeply respectful. "She is some sort of princess, I believe, though only Russian. She very seldom goes out, but there's a-many comes to see her. Very kindly, generous lady, sir, and the best tenant these flats have ever had. We get all sorts of nobility here now and then calling on her."

"What does the household consist of?" Slane inquired.

"There's a companion—a young lady—her private maid, two women servants and three men servants."

"She's not poor then, like most of the Russians?"

The sergeant smiled in almost pitying fashion.

"Not she," he declared. "I should say she's got all she wanted—wine and flowers, and all the best foods from the tip-top trades—"

people The dressmakers come and wait upon her themselves She has two motor-cars, and the finest private box in the house whenever she goes to the theatre or opera Plenty of money there, sir "

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you for your information," Slane said, slipping a pound note into his hand "I don't seem to have come any nearer a solution of this business, but what you have told me is certainly helpful "

The man looked at the pound note His manner was respectful, but a little dubious

"It's too much, this, sir, just for answering a few questions," he remonstrated

"You shall earn it, then," Slane told him, "by answering just one more question You have one of the new telephone home exchanges here, I see Very useful things, they are, for small flats Now, can you tell me why the wire entering Lord Minchingham's number in the case there is cut? There you are, you see—two inches above the stand "

The commissioner swung round to face the instrument He stared at the severed cord, and his mouth grew wider and wider open His eyes were positively bulbous

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed "It was all right last time I looked that way I'll swear it was "

"It was all right at a quarter past nine," Slane declared, "because his lordship rang me up at the Lavender Club Who else has been down in the hall since then?"

The commissioner's face was a study in bewilderment He could scarcely take his eyes off the cut cord

"Why, no one out of the usual, sir Just me and William, the lift-man There was the Princess's maid went out with the two little dogs, same as she does every now and then One of the men servants came down to smoke a cigarette, and waited for her out in the street I can't remember another soul, sir Certainly, there's no one from outside has entered this building, and no one has left it that hasn't come back "

"Very well," Slane said, "we'll leave it at that You've no idea who cut the telephone? That's a part of the mystery, I suppose Now tell me You look like a man of common sense You know as much of the affair as we do Where should you think this gentleman, Mr Cartwright, could have got to?"

"Threwed himself out of one of the windows, I should think, sir," the man replied "I can't think of any other way he could have disappeared without passing out of the front door The only thing that seems to me possible is that he may have been a friend of the Princess's The telephone call may have been from her He may have slipped down there, and been taken ill, or something of that

sort It don't sound likely, of course, as you say the gentleman had sat down to play a game of cards, but then nothing sounds likely "

Slane nodded

"You're quite right," he admitted. "Nothing sounds likely. You will be here for at least an hour, won't you?"

"I shall be here until you leave this place," the man declared vigorously "I'll be here to let you out, whatever time you come down "

Slane took the lift to Minchingham's apartments The three men were waiting eagerly for his coming

"We have searched every corner of the place," Minchingham announced "Thomson has been up in the garrets Whatever has become of Cartwright, he isn't here Have you had any luck?"

"None at all," Slane replied "We are narrowing the thing down, though The Princess is our last hope I am going there now."

"Then for heaven's sake take a drink first," his host suggested "You need all your nerve to pay an eleven o'clock call there upon such an errand "

Slane helped himself to a whisky and soda, and sat for a moment upon the arm of an easy-chair

"Ronny wasn't in any sort of trouble, I suppose?" he asked

"Not he," Minchingham replied forcibly "He was going strong with his job I have never seen the fellow so keen and well in his life "

"Any woman around?"

"Only one—his wife Sweetest little thing you ever saw She and Ronny are devoted to each other "

Slane finished his whisky and soda, and set down the empty glass

"So that's that," he said "Now for our last hope! "

Once or twice lately Slane had asked himself half in derision, whether by continually focusing his mind upon certain subjects he had not become psychic Certain it was that after he had left Minchingham's flat and begun the descent of those few stairs which lay between him and his destination he had a feeling that he was moving towards the solution of this baffling mystery He paused before the dark mahogany door, and rang the bell A grave and irreproachably dressed man servant answered his summons almost immediately

"Is the Princess at home?" Slane inquired

The man was obviously surprised

"Her Highness is at home," he admitted, "but she does not, as a rule, receive. Have you an appointment, sir?"

Slane shook his head

"Mine is quite unexpected business," he confided "Please take my card to her, and ask her if she will give me a brief interview "

The man accepted the card, and disappeared There was the sound of surprised feminine voices from the room which he had entered He returned, however, without undue delay

"Will you come this way, sir?" he invited

He ushered Slane at once into a delightfully comfortable, though rather over-heated, lounge sitting-room An aristocratic-looking lady, with white hair brushed back from her forehead, dark eyes, dressed simply in black but wearing some very beautiful jewellery, looked across at him curiously Close to her chair, a young girl, also in black, with heavy features, dark, strongly marked eyebrows, and narrow eyes, was seated with a book in her hand, apparently interrupted in the task of reading aloud She, too, looked inquiringly at this visitor

"Princess," Sir Jasper said, as the door closed, "I must apologise profoundly for this visit, and for intruding upon you at such an hour All that I can do is to throw myself upon your consideration May I explain my errand?"

"By all means," the Princess acquiesced, in a voice which, notwithstanding its foreign accent, was very sweet and mellow "Will you please to sit down?" she added, waving him to a chair "This is my companion, whose presence you will not mind Let me hear, please, what it is that you want from me at this strange hour of the evening "

"It is something which will, I am sure, sound absurd to you," Slane confessed, "so I shall first of all tell you of the predicament we are in My friend who lives in the flat above, Lord Minchingham, had three other men to play bridge with him to-night About an hour and a half ago—it may have been two hours—they were in the act of sitting down to their game when one of the party—a Mr Cartwright—was summoned to the telephone He left the room and did not return In due course, Lord Minchingham went out to look for him He had disappeared That, Princess, was an hour and a half ago at least, and both the commissioner and the lift-man are ready to swear that he has not left the building There is no other exit save by the front way It remains, therefore, an incontrovertible fact that our missing friend is somewhere close at hand "

"This is very mysterious," the Princess murmured, with the air of one sufficiently intrigued

"It is almost amazing," Slane agreed, glancing for a moment at the sullen face of the girl, who was listening attentively, but without any excessive show of interest "Cartwright has not left this building Very well—where can he be? We have explored

thoroughly every inch of Lord Minchingham's flat. The offices which occupy the floor below you are every one of them locked, and to the best of the commissionaire's belief their tenants left at the usual time four or five hours ago. They are all unlighted and apparently unoccupied. You see, Princess, that leaves us only your apartments in the whole of this building. I am going to ask you the great favour of being allowed, in company with one of your servants, to search your flat."

The Princess's forehead was wrinkled in surprise. There was a little smile at the corners of her mouth. She was like a beautiful miniature, with her ivory skin, still brilliant eyes, and lips the colour of which she had not neglected to deepen.

"But, Sir Jasper," she exclaimed, "this is incredible! I can assure you with every confidence that no gentleman has presented himself here this evening, for I have not left the salon. I do not receive nowadays, except my intimate friends, and I do not even know this Mr—what did you call him?—Cartwright? Why should you imagine that he might by any possibility be in my flat?"

"Princess," Slane pointed out, "the suggestion seems as incredible to us as to you. Please try to realise our point of view. A man cannot dissolve into thin air, and it has been demonstrated that this gentleman must be in this building, every part of which except your apartment, has been thoroughly explored. No other situation would have induced me to make a suggestion which I know quite well must sound unreasonable."

The Princess glanced at his card.

"I seem to know your name, Sir Jasper," she mused. "I go out so little that my circle of acquaintances is limited—but I fancy there is something familiar about it. You write, perhaps?"

"Very seldom. A few articles on crime from various angles. But I know the Countess Montzini quite well. She is, I believe, a friend of yours."

"Dear Olga!" the Princess murmured. "Of course she is. Well, have your own way, Sir Jasper. Ring the bell, Anna. We will hand this gentleman over to Grubling."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," Slane acknowledged, rising, "and so, I am sure, Lord Minchingham will be. I promise that I will be as little obtrusive as possible."

The Princess smiled at him.

"You will find my small apartments of scant interest to you, I fear," she observed. "Search them thoroughly, however, and come and see me before you leave, Sir Jasper. . ."

Grubling, duly summoned, proved to be the usual type of tactician but perfectly well trained servant, and was evidently of either German or Russian nationality. He was not the man who had admitted Slane, but appeared to be a sort of major-domo.

The Princess explained what was required. His stolid features showed no surprise.

"If the gentleman will follow me," he begged, with a stiff bow.

Under his tutelage, Slane proceeded to make a careful inspection of the whole flat. The Princess's bedroom and boudoir were, as one might have expected, miracles of daintiness combined with a certain sad splendour. Certainly, they bore no trace of any masculine visit. The apartment of Mademoiselle Anna was as bare as a domestic's—an iron bedstead spread, however, with fine linen, an iron cross on the wall opposite, and one beautiful picture of the Virgin. An unused sleeping apartment was stored with a number of priceless pieces of furniture and *objets d'art*. Cupboards in various places, which Grubling unlocked, were filled with glass and rare china. The servants' quarters were ordinary, but Slane explored them inch by inch, even to the telephone closet.

"There remains nothing else, sir," the man announced at last, respectfully. "You have been in every room and seen every cupboard."

Slane pressed a pound note into his hand, and regretted the trouble he had given. The man accepted the note and opened once more the door of the salon. The Princess looked round with a little smile.

"Well," she mocked good-humouredly, "you did not find your friend concealed by chance under my bed or lurking in my wardrobe? He is good-looking, perhaps, this Mr Cartwright. I have no doubt missed something."

Slane indulged in an apologetic gesture.

"My friend does not seem to have had the good fortune to have found his way here at all," he confessed. "It only remains for me to ask your pardon for this intrusion, and to thank you most gratefully."

She held up her fingers, and he was sufficiently versed in foreign customs to stoop and brush them with his lips. The girl's face, as she bade him good night, was expressionless.

"Come and see me again some day, Sir Jasper," the Princess invited. "You must at least, come and tell me all about your missing friend and where you found him."

"If you will allow me, I will certainly feel that I owe you that courtesy," Slane replied.

He was on his way to the door, more bewildered than ever. Even his instinct had been at fault. Without a doubt it was impossible that Cartwright could be in the flat. And then, for a moment, he hesitated, and a little thrill stole through his pulse. Upon a round mahogany table stood a great bowl of lilies, and in the shadow of the bowl there was something crumpled up, barely recognisable, which brought the light shooting into his eyes. He

paused, stooped down to smell the flowers, and his fingers closed upon a very unconsidered trifle—something just out of sight of the Princess and her companion. Grubling was holding the door open. Mademoiselle Anna had picked up her book ready to recommence the reading. The Princess was leaning over towards an ivory box filled with cigarettes, her dainty fingers extended. Slane, with a farewell bow, passed out.

II

THEY were all three waiting for him impatiently when he re-entered the library of the flat above. The cards were still upon the table.

"Well?" Minchingham inquired.

"Give me a whisky and soda," Slane begged.

His host hastened to serve him.

"Any luck?"

"I don't know. Let me think for a moment. Count your cards, you fellows."

They came to the table, amazed at this strange request, but did as they were bidden, and reported thirteen each. Slane took up Cartwright's cards, which he had brought back from the hall, and let them fall through his fingers one by one. From his trousers pocket he produced a crumpled-up playing card with the same back.

"Thirteen," he murmured, letting it drop on the top of the others.

They all stared at him.

"What the devil are you driving at?" Minchingham demanded, taking up the battered card.

"One second," Slane begged, "let's be certain of this. The card you have there, Minchingham, is the two of spades. Has any one else the two of spades?"

"Not in my hand," Minchingham declared.

"Nor mine," Martin Phipps echoed.

"Nor mine," from Goring Brett.

Slane glanced through Cartwright's hand.

"There is no other two of spades," he announced. "This card, therefore, belongs to Cartwright's hand. He left twelve outside upon the table. When he was called or fetched away he took this one with him. I found it crumpled up as though he'd held it tightly in his hand in a moment of agitation, downstairs in the flat of the Princess Madziwill."

There was a brief period of stupefied silence. No one at first succeeded in grasping the situation.

"What the devil did the fellow mean by going down there without a word to us?" Minchingham demanded

"And not coming back?" Goring Brett added

"Is he there now?" Martin Phipps asked

"He is not there now," Slane assured them, "unless he has been dissolved into vapour or cut into small pieces and hidden in a hundred different places. When I first arrived the Princess showed nothing but mild amusement at my request. She put me in charge of a manservant, and I was shown over her apartments. I have explored every inch of them. She assured me, in the presence of her companion, that she had received no visitor, and that she had no knowledge of any Mr Cartwright. She also told me that she had been in the salon the whole of the evening. Yet that card, which was in Cartwright's hand when he left the room, was in the salon."

Minchingham clasped his head between his hands

"Get on with it, Slane," he begged. "You're driving us crazy."

"I'm pretty well that way myself," Slane retorted. "We have to go back for a moment to the commissioner. I believe him when he says that no one has left the place. There is only that one front exit."

"Couldn't have jumped out of the window, could he?" Goring Brett suggested hesitatingly

"Cartwright is a level-headed fellow," Slane pointed out. "He is scarcely likely to indulge in a jump of sixty feet or so on to some spiked railings without some serious object. Nevertheless, I fancy that our next move must be to the street."

"Have you any theory at all?" Minchingham demanded, as they made their way towards the lift

"Only the ghost of a one," was the frank avowal.

"Any news, sir?" the lift-man inquired, throwing open the gates

"Not at present."

"Has the gentleman turned up, sir?" the commissioner asked eagerly, as he rose to receive them

"No sign of him yet. Don't leave your place there. We're only just going outside."

They stood on the edge of the pavement. It was still a miserable night, but the driving snow had ceased. Slane backed a little into the street and looked up. On the ground floor were the large plate-glass windows of the Hanover Models, Limited, above four dark windows belonging to various offices. Then the windows of the Princess's flat, through the drawn curtains of which shone a faint streak of light. Slane, whose whole interest seemed to be centred in the windows immediately below the Princess's flat, called to the commissioner, and pointed upward.

"Those streaks of light there," he asked, "belong, I imagine, to the apartment of the Princess?"

"That is so, sir," the man agreed

"Now, whose offices are those below?"

"A gentleman named Michael, kind of an agent for furs and oriental things"

"What sort of a man is he?"

The commissioner was dubious

"One of them foreigners, sir," he confided "Stout fellow, with a beard and kind of foreign way of dressing His references were O K, and he's got the premises for three years Keeps two clerks there and a typist"

Slane's interest in the windows seemed to have abated He crossed the pavement towards the main entrance of the flats

"Upstairs for a minute," he begged "Sergeant, we shall be back again directly Don't relax Something might happen, and above all let no one pass out"

"I'll see to that, sir," the man promised

They shot up to the third floor As soon as the door of the library was closed behind them, Slane turned to his host

"Minchingham," he demanded, "have you a weapon of any sort, and an electric torch?"

"I've got one revolver," was the somewhat dazed reply "Plenty of electric torches What in God's name——"

"Just a minute or two, there's a good fellow," Slane interrupted "I may be making an absolute ass of myself, but give me a chance"

Minchingham ransacked a cupboard and discovered a revolver, which he handed to Slane, together with a torch

"Come along down, you fellows, if you like," the latter invited "I'm not going to do anything desperate I'm just going to listen outside the premises of Mr Michael If there's no one there, there's nothing doing"

No one was willing to be left behind They crept downstairs on tiptoe, found the brass plate indicating the offices of Messrs Michael and Son, and grouped themselves round the door There was no light to be seen inside, nor was there at first any sort of sound to be heard A few breathless moments passed Then Slane, who had been on his hands and knees on the floor, rose silently to his feet There was a gleam in his eyes and a new tenseness in his manner He beckoned to the others to follow him, and they descended to the hall The sergeant was still at his post, and the lift-man was seated in his chair

"Sergeant," Slane confided, "there's something wrong upstairs"

"Where, sir?" the man demanded, startled

"Never mind Take this gun whilst I telephone Don't let a soul—man or woman—leave this place "

"I don't need a gun, sir," the commissioner declared confidently "There's no one could pass out of here against my will "

"If you were Jack Dempsey, you'd need a gun if the other man had one," was the dry rejoinder "You keep it, sergeant Minchingham, I'm going to telephone to Scotland Yard When things are in train I'll tell you what's in my mind "

Minchingham nodded

"Go ahead, old chap," he enjoined "I leave everything to you "

Slane crossed towards the telephone Suddenly he paused Every one in the little group seemed electrified It was a small happening, but somehow or other it had almost a paralysing effect upon them all The lift-bell rang!

There was a moment's silence, broken by Slane, with a quick, imperative question

"Who'd be going out at this time of night, sergeant?"

"I can't imagine, sir," the man acknowledged

The attendant banged the iron doors to and glided up With only a few seconds' delay the lift reappeared Out stepped Mademoiselle Anna, in a thick coat, carrying an umbrella, and with a small Pekinese under her arm She made her way towards the door, but Slane blocked her progress

"Sorry, Mademoiselle," he apologised, "but do you think your little dog could dispense with his exercise to-night? He has already been out, hasn't he?"

She looked at him with flashing eyes

"He goes out several times every night," she replied "We are late because you upset the Princess He must certainly go as far as the corner "

She would have pushed her way past him, but Slane did not move

"Mademoiselle," he said gravely, "the dog, after all, is not a vital affair An order has been given that no one should leave this place until a certain matter has been cleared up "

Her eyes were full of wicked anger

"Who is there to give such an order?" she demanded, making another effort to pass

Slane held her by the shoulder

"Mademoiselle," he insisted, "you will not be permitted to reach the street You will not be permitted to return even from whence you came Sergeant, take care of this young lady for a few moments I will hold you blameless in case there is any trouble "

She opened her mouth to shriek, but the commissioner's hand

was upon her lips Slane stepped past her to the office telephone "Give me 1000Y," he begged "Quickly, please It's a police call . That Scotland Yard? . . Sir Jasper Slane speaking I don't suppose that by any chance Inspector Stimpson is in? What's that? Just come in from Deptford? Ask him if he can speak with me . . Sent for a taxi, has he? Never mind Tell him I have urgent business for him He had better bring three or four men, and come himself, to Cunningham Mansions I'll be waiting for him in the hall Ask him to make it as quickly as possible "

He rang off The girl was still struggling

"Look here," Slane remonstrated, "you'll do yourself no good going on like this The game's up, whatever it was Where's Mr Cartwright?"

"What do I know about Mr Cartwright?" she fumed

Slane shrugged his shoulders and turned away She looked at him with the hatred of a wild animal A tense quarter of an hour ensued Then a motor car, followed by a taxi, drew up outside Stimpson, accompanied by four constables, hastened in Words flashed backwards and forwards without prelude

"Michael and Son?" Stimpson repeated eagerly "We've had information in about them during the last few days First floor, did you say?"

"Give the Inspector your pass-key, Sergeant," Slane begged "You can let the young woman go now, if you like "

There was no longer any attempt at concealment They turned on the lights in the corridor as they reached the first floor Stimpson glanced around

"I'd keep these gentlemen out of it, if I were you, sir," he advised, turning to Slane "If you've stumbled up against the crowd I think you have, they're likely to show fight "

No one took any notice, and the sergeant, producing his pass-key, opened up the premises of Messrs Michael and Son Entering, the little party of men found themselves in a sort of showroom, with glass cases on stands down the centre, and a few rare furs hanging on the walls A touch of the switch, and the room was flooded with light At the same moment, from the transom of the office beyond, a light flashed out and disappeared

"Send two of your men back to the hall, Stimpson," Slane begged "There's a trap-door from the apartment above down to the office here They may try to get up that way, and down the stairs "

Stimpson gave swift orders, and afterwards they pressed forward The office door was locked, but once more the sergeant's pass-key was successful Stimpson thrust his gun through the opening, and followed it cautiously The room was empty except for one man

seated in a chair, to which he was closely bound. Dangling from the ceiling was a beautifully made rope ladder.

"Good for you, Jasper, old chap!" Cartwright, who was partially gagged, croaked. "Cut these blasted cords, some one."

The thing was done in a moment. Cartwright pointed to the rope ladder.

"Quick, some of you fellows," he enjoined. "There's a trap-door there to the Princess's kitchen. It was that butler of hers who got me. He's just gone up with Michael. Quick, or they'll get down the stairs!"

Slane smiled reassuringly.

"Their welcome's waiting for them in the hall right enough," he promised. "Don't you worry, Cartwright."

"What the devil do you mean by breaking up a rubber like that?" Minchingham demanded.

Cartwright grinned feebly.

"What the devil do you mean by living over a gang of Bolshies?" he muttered. "Lead me to a whisky and soda."

III

ON the following evening, Jasper Slane was the honoured guest at the house of a Cabinet Minister. Certain matters were there explained to him.

"I should find it difficult," his host declared pompously, "to express to you, Sir Jasper, how deeply indebted the Government of this country feels towards you for your services of last night. I will frankly admit that all our own men were on the wrong track. We knew of the existence of this gang—the infinite mischief they were doing—but we never associated the Princess Madziwill with anything of the sort. It seems now that she escaped from Russia and saved her fortune by espousing Bolshevik doctrines. By degrees, it appears, so far as I can learn, she actually adopted them honestly and from a certain amount of conviction. Anyhow, she has been furnishing the Soviet people here and in Moscow with amazing information week after week. This last affair—Cartwright has explained that, I suppose?"

"Not thoroughly," Slane admitted.

"Well, there's a steamer coming up the Channel now with a million pounds' worth of Soviet gold on board," the Cabinet Minister confided. "The Soviet envoy here was beside himself to find out what the Cabinet had decided about seizing it. Cartwright was practically the only man outside the Cabinet who knew. He's been followed for days. They got him last night by a most transparent trick."

"Rang me up at Minchingham's," Cartwright intervened from the other side of the table, "and gave me the Foreign Office password for 'Wanted immediately' I recognised the password, which has never yet failed, and did just as I was told—descended by the stairs to speak to a messenger who was waiting in the Princess's flat I just remembered hearing the butler behind me whilst I was bowing over her fingers, and the next thing I knew I was in that office below I sat there with a gun pushed into my ribs for at least an hour, and they were just planning a little further amusement for me, I think, when you fellows came along "

"What are you doing with them, sir?" Slane asked his host

"There I'm afraid our attitude to you must be a little apologetic," the Cabinet Minister confessed "We are particularly anxious to avoid a crisis at the present moment The Princess left this morning for the South of France She will never return to England Grubling, Michael, his son, and the Princess's other two servants, have been deported They left from Hull this afternoon You have performed a great service to the State, Sir Jasper, and we shall know how to reward it, but there will be nothing in the papers of any raid on Cunningham Mansions "

"I'm quite content, sir," Slane assured his host "So far as I was concerned, except for a certain amount of anxiety, it was a most pleasant and exciting evening "

Cartwright leaned forward from across the table

"Tell me," he begged, "how did you tumble to the fact that I was—or had been, in the Princess's flat?"

"The two of spades—your thirteenth card," Slane confided

THE AZTEC SKULL

By

GAVIN HOLT

MAJOR BEVIS has sometimes described Professor Bastion as a magnet for trouble. Certainly the Professor was not looking for anything when he accompanied his long-legged friend to Mexico. Intent upon a peaceful holiday, he had put behind him those criminological pursuits that had brought him so often into peculiar and exciting situations. He became again a mild and amiable scientist with a taste for archæology, but in his very first Aztec ruin he turned up trouble.

Bevis had a mission in Mexico City. Though retired from active work as a mining-engineer, he had agreed to look over some reports for old friends of his in the North-Western Consolidated Company. The task took him longer than he had expected. The Professor, bored by silver problems, started up country on a one-man expedition. He visited the remains of an Aztec palace outside Santa Teresa. He poked around with a stick and picked up two or three curios. A few hours later the fun began.

Hot and weary after a day in the sun, he returned to his wretched inn at Santa Teresa. The meal the posadero served him was enough to make him swear off Aztec ruins for life. He drank some appalling wine, smoked a while, and retired to a hard and lumpy bed.

In the middle of the night his room was entered. Dimly he made out two shadowy forms close to his couch. He rubbed his eyes. He was not dreaming. He had started from a doze with a feeling of threat in the air.

"I say, do you want anything?" he inquired mildly.

One of the intruders seemed rather surprised by the question. He sprang at the Professor, but missed his mark as the little man got swiftly out of bed on the wrong side. Then Bastion raised such an outcry that the whole establishment was roused. The intruders leaped through the window on to the roof of a lean-to shed, and so to their waiting horses.

The innkeeper fired a gun, his chef fired a gun. The yard man shot off a revolver. Presently, when most of the town had responded to the alarm, a rurale wandered over from the barracks, shrugged his shoulders, and murmured something about bandidos.

"Yes!" Bastion caught at the word "Bandidos! You chase them! Pronto!"

The trooper shrugged again

"To-night it is useless," he said "There is no moon, señor And if there was a moon, it would be useless The bandidos are here! Spzz! They are not here! It is no good for the señor to ask for miracles In the morning I report the matter Then some one will look for clues Has the señor been robbed?"

The señor went hastily over his possessions and concluded that he had not been robbed

"So," said the trooper, "there is no need for us to lose any more sleep Even if the señor had been robbed——"

Bastion felt weak He ordered some ice water

"*Por el amor de Dios,*" groaned his host "It is summer, señor! Ice, it melt!"

In the morning the Professor missed his back stud It was not a very valuable stud He had paid five cents for it in New York But it had served its purpose, and it had to be replaced He went out to replace it As he emerged from the inn he saw an evil-looking, one-eyed *vaquero* leaning against a post of the verandah

There is only one street in Santa Teresa Bastion walked along it until he saw a likely shop He entered it and claimed the attention of the shopkeeper Not knowing the word for what he required, he seized the back of his collar, made eloquent and urgent noises, and described with two fingers the curved outlines of a stud The intelligent Mexican brought him an overcoat with a well-defined waist-line The Professor's gestures were more effective when he revealed the parting of collar and neckband A light of beatific understanding dispelled the shopkeeper's frown of bewilderment Bastion adjusted his newly-acquired stud and went forth to find the one-eyed *vaquero* examining some highly-coloured silk shirts that were displayed in the window

Wherever he went that morning the Professor was followed by the sinister *vaquero* He spoke to a policeman about it, but the one-eyed cowboy did not wait to be questioned He vanished The policeman was sympathetic but not unduly alarmed Bastion went back to his inn When he looked from a window, the *vaquero* was leaning against a verandah post Santa Teresa had already managed to get on his nerves Now he decided to leave on his return trip to Mexico City a little earlier than he had intended He decided, in fact, to take the first train to Granadilla

At the station he was attacked by three men who tried to seize his luggage The Professor yelled Two station officials ran to his help The thieves abandoned their booty and fled

When the small spur-line train moved off from Granadilla, the Professor sat up in his day-coach seat and began to think In

Mexico—or any other country for that matter—any one's room might be entered. But in Mexico—was it so strange? He understood that bandits had a fairly respectable voting strength. Some of them had been known to vote effectively a hundred yards from the polling booth. At fifty they might prevent the election of any man. Bandits. Yes, he could reasonably dismiss the affair at the inn. But why was a respectable and not too affluent-looking traveller followed all the morning by a one-eyed *vaquero*? Why was he set upon at the station?

He sank lower in his seat as he rolled a cigarette. He was not an impressive figure. He was short and thin and bald, except for a thick tuft-like fringe of light sandy hair extending from the back of one ear to the back of the other. The pale-blue eyes that peered through lenses like gig-lamps were the eyes of a contemplative student.

Bevis used to say that Bastion was the mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled a theory before the Royal Society or cut a caper for the benefit of the London Anthropologists. But Bastion had other qualities although they might not have been suspected by any one who watched him on that trip to Granadilla.

He finished rolling his cigarette, thrust his bag of shag into the pocket of his coat, and discovered that he had no matches. A prospective borrower, he raised his head and looked about him. His inquiring glance was drawn to and held by a single burning orb. Surprise caused him to drop his cigarette. Three seats down the coach and facing him sat the sinister *vaquero*.

Bastion got up, recovered his cigarette and walked along to the man.

"*Paqueta?*" he suggested amiably, placing the cigarette between his lips and pointing to it.

The eye gave no sign of understanding. Bastion was full of mistrust of his Spanish. He made an effort and tried again.

"*Fosforo? Cerilla?*"

The *vaquero* thrust back his pastoral coat and felt in some mysterious pocket. The Professor saw the hilt of a knife protruding from the man's belt, but he produced nothing more dangerous than a box of matches.

Bastion lit his cigarette, watching the strange man. The face, in its unbalanced ugliness, was like a grotesque mask. From a long upper lip a queer wisp of dark moustache trailed down towards a pointed chin that had once been opened by a knife and was now crookedly knit in a repulsive woe.

The borrower returned the box of matches with a murmur of thanks. The *vaquero* grunted.

"This train is very slow," observed the Professor sociably in his best Castilian.

The *vaquero* grunted again

"But it will get there just the same," Bastion persisted

This time the *vaquero* did not condescend to grunt. The Professor shrugged his shoulders and went back to his seat.

On the platform at Granadilla the *vaquero* was not in sight. Bastion had the heavy bag containing his curios checked through to Mexico City, and taking a suitcase with him he went to the American Hotel to spend the night.

After breakfast next morning he had two hours to kill before train time. He walked abroad to see the town, and was relieved to observe that the *vaquero* was no longer on his trail. But when he went back to his hotel to claim his suitcase, it was to find that he had once more been made the victim of a raid. His room had been entered, his suitcase forced open and ransacked.

The Professor was furious. He called the manager and stormed. He whirled his belongings into the suitcase, dashed to the station, and just managed to catch his train.

All the way to Mexico City he was allowed to roll his cigarettes in peace, and in the early night he came to his destination, feeling safe at last. The lights, the throngs were familiar. An obliging porter shepherded him to a taxi. Bastion gave the address of the house that had been provided for Major Bevis by the thoughtful mining company. Then, quite at ease, he reclined in the comfortable interior of the cab. He did not lean forward until the driver turned from the main thoroughfare into a narrow, unfamiliar street. So the fellow was trying to boost the fare by following a roundabout route!

"Take the shortest way," Bastion shouted at him.

The answer was more speed but no change of direction. Heedless of threats, the chauffeur drove into a dark alley, swooped towards the kerb, and stopped. Bastion, thoroughly angry, stepped from the cab. Two men rushed at him from the shadows. As Bastion drew back instinctively, the chauffeur leaned from his seat and gave him a push. He staggered, and one of the men seized him. He kicked out with his thin legs and swung his arms with the violence of desperation. He got a purchase against the step of the taxi and gave a sudden shove. Over went his captor, and over went the Professor on top of him, shouting for help.

Bastion's luck held. A uniformed man came running to his aid. His assailants fled in the cab. Except for a few bruises, he was unhurt, but his suitcase was gone. He picked himself up and found another taxi.

When Major Bevis heard the tale of these singular adventures, he fixed his monocle and glared down at his short friend.

"What did you collect in Santa Teresa?" he demanded.

"Nothing," answered the Professor "I picked up a few bricks and things at the Aztec ruins"

"Ah! So that's the explanation!"

"What is?"

"You go out to these ruins, and immediately the local inhabitants begin to overwhelm you with attentions Why? Because you got away with something they want Just what was it you lifted from the Aztec palace?"

"Nothing——" The Professor reflected "Wait a minute! I did find a skull"

"A skull!" The Major grinned "You run off with a sacred relic, and you wonder why you're attacked! Did you examine the skull?"

"No, I didn't have time, but it's ridiculous to suppose——"

"How did you come across it?" interrupted the Major

"I was poking about in a corner The thing was stuck in a niche under a heap of stones—a kind of shallow well"

"Anybody see you with it?"

Again the Professor reflected

"There were four or five horsemen riding towards the ruins just as I left with my guide, but I had the skull wrapped up in a piece of newspaper They couldn't have seen it"

"Well, you've lost it now I suppose it was in the stolen suitcase"

"Not at all," answered the Professor "It's in the bag I checked through from Granadilla I'm going to claim it this very minute"

Protesting that Bastion needed a guardian, the Major went with him to the station Something like a half-hour later they were back in the house with the bag open between them Bastion fished out a newspaper parcel, unwrapped it, and disclosed his find

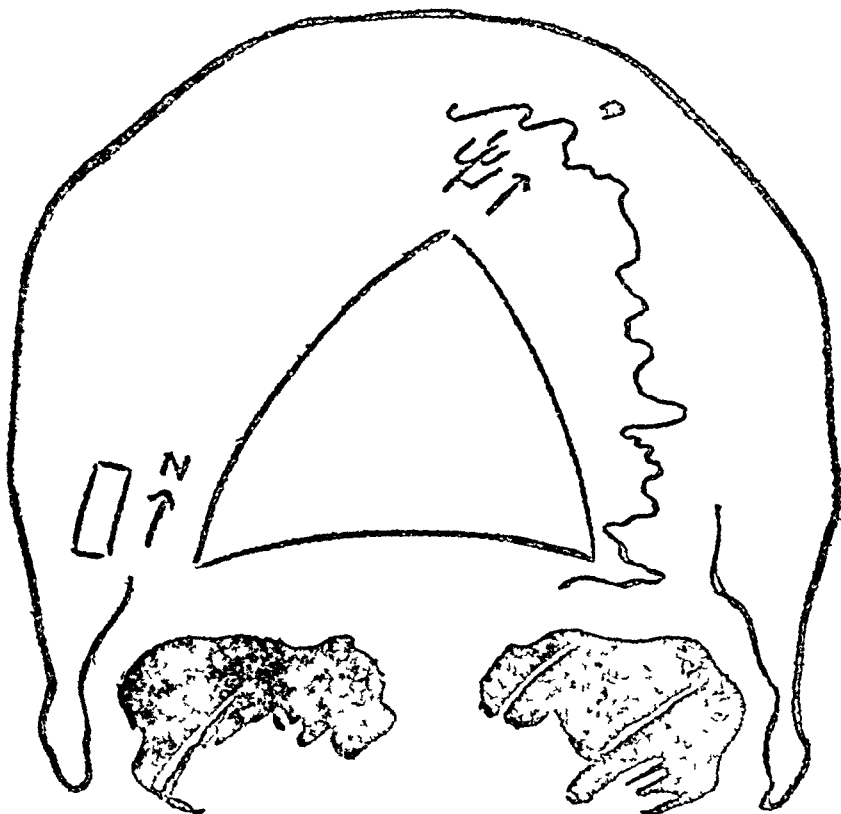
Obviously the skull was in an excellent state of preservation, although the lower part was missing The cranium and facial bones were partly covered with hard mud Bevis probed the interior with a pencil as if he expected to discover a hidden message His efforts were fruitless

Bastion took the skull and pencil and tapped the clay covering A little of the hard mud came away in flakes He stared at the bleached bone, then pointed to a purple mark "Indelible pencil!" he commented, and he chipped till all the clay fell off and the frontal bone was clean For his reward he had a cryptic drawing with a crude triangle in the centre To the left of the baseline and above the right eye-socket was a small rectangle, and, parallel with the right side of this, an arrow pointed to an "N" From the top of the cranium, descending towards the left eye-socket, was a long twisting line like the course of a stream or a sharply indented coast The base of the triangle ran towards one of the deeper indentations

At the apex was a rough figure with angled arms, and at the side of this a second arrow pointed to another indentation in the winding line. Above the line, close to the centre of the cranium, was a purple blob.

"The thing appears to be a plan!" exclaimed Bevis.

"Certainly it's a plan," answered Bastion, "and the only thing that's clear is in the indication of the magnetic pole—the arrow and the 'N'. I can't make out what the thing at the top of the triangle is. It looks like a Christmas tree."



"More like a cactus," asserted Bevis.

"That's what it is," the Professor decided, and he became thoughtful. There were a lot of cacti in the valley of the Aztec ruins.

For an hour the two companions discussed the puzzle of the skull, but it was not to be solved in Mexico City. They had the feeling that it was not to be solved at all when they parted for the night. The Professor was irritated. He was also dog-tired. He stretched himself on his bed, switched off the light, and knew no

more until he felt a hand pressing on his shoulder. He awoke startled, as from a nightmare, and one breath resolved a vague fear into a reality.

Chloroform! He struggled in darkness, but it was no use. He was held down until he lost his senses. When he opened his eyes again the sun was up. He was still in bed, but bound hand and foot with a light rope. He was annoyed. Where was Bevis? Why hadn't he come to give help?

Annoyance changed to anxiety. By turning his head he could see a clock on the bureau. The time was not yet six.

He tugged at the rope that bound his wrists. In ten minutes his skin was broken, but he did not mind the pain. He persevered and at last freed himself. He sat up, kicked his feet into his slippers, and dashed across the corridor to his friend's room. The Major, with a towel swathing the lower part of his face, was trussed and helpless on his bed. When the Professor released him, he wrenched at the towel and pulled a gag from his mouth.

"The skull!" he cried, as if he had been waiting all night to say those two words. "They were after the skull." And he ran downstairs to the study with the Professor at his heels. In the doorway they stopped. Their eyes went to the table where the Aztec skull had been left overnight. It was gone.

Instinctively the Professor lowered his glance towards the floor. He sought the gruesome relic, but what he saw shocked him so that he stepped back involuntarily, clutching at the Major's arm.

"What is it?" demanded Bevis.

"What is it!" echoed the Professor. "It's murder! Good Lord, man, it's murder!"

Sprawling half under a table was the body of a man, a stranger. Bastion stooped and made a hasty examination. The man was dead, stabbed. He must have been dead for some hours. Bevis stared in bewilderment. The stranger had a lean face of a swarthy Mexican type, with skin drawn tightly over the bones. He lay partly across an Indian rug, and with one finger he had traced something on the polished parquet. In dark stain three symbols stood out. They looked like BA7.

"And the skull's gone," remarked Bevis very quietly.

"Yes," answered the Professor. "The skull's gone, and we're left with more riddles to solve. A dead man and a message in blood. His last thought was to leave a clue. B-A-seven! What can that mean?"

The Major looked around the room. Lace window curtains lifted in the morning breeze. The window was open. A hole had been cut in a small pane near the catch.

"There were two parties after the skull," decided the Professor. "The dead man represented one of them. The marks on the floor

stand for the other party You'd better call the police, Bevis Perhaps they'll be able to make something out of it "

Bevis telephoned A certain Señor Valentín arrived from headquarters He looked like a retired matador and he spoke English with a Scotch accent As soon as he saw the symbols on the floor, he called up his chief, Señor Meliton Decond Señor Decond came with amazing speed He was a lithe, dapper man with an airman's eyes in a handsome face It was at once evident that the symbols meant something to him The Professor requested an explanation

"The explanation is Baza, señor," said Decond "What you read as a '7' is the beginning of a 'Z' If the dying man had had the strength, he would have completed the 'Z' and added an 'A' The word he wished to write was Baza You have heard of Miguel Baza, perhaps?"

"You mean the bandit?"

"The bandit, señor I do not know this dead man, but I know that Baza has had much trouble with some of his followers On one of his recent raids in the hills there was a revolt The rurales found evidence of a fierce struggle The bandits had killed one another Now it would seem that some sort of feud is going on It is pursued even in Mexico City "

"Then if Baza is responsible for this murder, if *he* wanted the skull, he is responsible for the attacks upon me!"

"Attacks! Skull! I beg you to enlighten me, señor "

The Professor told his story, and when he had finished he endeavoured to reproduce on paper the crude drawing he had seen on the skull Bevis was also induced to try Decond examined the plans, but they told him nothing

"No doubt they represent some locality," he said "It might be the stronghold of Baza himself, but the puzzle is too obscure for me For a year I have been moving all Mexico to bring this outlaw to justice He eludes me at every turn He boasts that he will never be taken, but some day I will prove that he is wrong "

Decond went off, leaving Valentín in charge The house was upset most of the morning Officials came and went Long formal depositions were made by the Professor and Bevis Towards mid-day things quietened down, and in the afternoon the Major went to see his friends of the North-Western Consolidated He came home in the evening with a story that interested the Professor a great deal

"It's funny that you should have run up against Baza," said Bevis "He held up a silver train belonging to the North-Western people a few weeks ago Near Santa Teresa, too The gang shot down the escort, got away with the booty, and then started a fracas among themselves—the one that Decond talked about this

morning The battle actually took place near that Aztec palace of yours "

"Ah!" murmured the Professor "I think I'd like to have a look over those ruins once more There's a train a little after nine in the morning We could be in Santa Teresa to-morrow night "

"I'm not going to stir from this place, and you're going to stay here with me," asserted Bevis He was very emphatic about it Nevertheless the Professor saw Granadilla again the next afternoon and the Major was with him The time of their connection for Santa Teresa left them with some hours to spare, and for want of something better to do, they strolled through the town

Bevis cast a professional eye on the sun-scorched hills in the distance There was silver in those hills, he knew them well The Professor, bent on solving the problem of the skull, found nothing to interest him Granadilla was just an inevitable halt by the wayside, a dull place, decidedly dull Bored with the prospect before him, he turned to look back down the street Then he was no longer bored, for moving along behind the two companions was the one-eyed *vaquero* Bastion gripped the Major's arm

"Don't look around," he said "My dear old cowboy friend has turned up and is trailing us with all his joyous abandon Attractive lad! He'd decorate a cell in any jail And he's for it, this very afternoon "

"Luck!" exclaimed Bevis "A bit of luck right at the start Let's make for that intersection ahead "

With a careful glance behind him he walked on, quickening his pace almost imperceptibly The Professor moved calmly at his side, revolving a plan Turning the next corner, the two stepped close to the wall of a building and waited The *vaquero* came on cautiously, but not cautiously enough to escape the trap His head was thrust round the corner Bevis leaped at him and threw his long arms about him Bastion plunged forward to give assistance as the man struggled

"Holá!" shouted the Professor, and pedestrians came running "Pickpocket! Cortabolsas! Robar! Policía! Policía!"

"It's a lie!" yelled the *vaquero* "Let me go! Let me go!"

An officer pushed his way through the crowd and Bastion demanded the arrest of the protesting captive The policeman made a few inquiries on the spot The *vaquero's* face was his misfortune The officer consulted it briefly and acted With the crowd tailing off behind, the Professor, Bevis, the policeman and his prisoner made their way to the lock-up

When the *vaquero*, who gave the name of Gomez, was brought before a responsible official, the Professor dropped his fictitious charge, explained the situation briefly, and demanded that Gomez should be detained pending instructions from Señor Decond The

name of Decond had a magic significance. In a very few minutes Bastion was speaking to Mexico City by telephone. Decond said he would give immediate attention to the matter. He requested that Bastion and Bevis should stay in Granadilla until Señor Valentín arrived. Bastion replied that they were going on to Santa Teresa, and would be back in Granadilla next day. Decond argued politely. Bastion refused to be put off. He turned the police chief over to the local official, and a few minutes later he was permitted to depart with the Major.

There was still some time to spare, and, since they were thirsty and rather ruffled, they elected to spend it at the American Hotel.

The afternoon was hot. A small group had gathered in the lounge, some local residents, some strangers. Conspicuous in the latter class was a loud-voiced American who was talking disparagingly about no less a personality than Miguel Baza. A wizened, sun-burned little Mexican sat opposite and sometimes turned to one or other of his compatriots with a grin. The American was raucous in his criticism of the rurales for what he termed their "fiddling incapacity to apprehend a mere gun-man."

"*Madre Santísima!*" ejaculated the little Mexican. "What can we do? Baza's the devil himself. He cuts your throat, and apologises while he does it."

"And you, I suppose, accept his apologies," shouted the American. "Give me ten men," he added. "Men, I say, and none of these local troopers, these rurales or whatever you call 'em. Give me ten men, and I'll bring you your son of a Yaqui squaw, tied up and ready for the rope."

"The señor is very brave," commented the Mexican.

"Rurales!" said the American contemptuously. "A couple of our mounted men could clean up the whole country!"

"If they lived, señor! The difficulty in the case of Miguel Baza is to live while you do the cleaning up."

The American, who seemed to be a very naive fellow, appealed to Bastion and Bevis for support, but they refused to be drawn into a debate. The gentleman from above the border was still hard at it when they left to catch their train.

"I can't stand that roaring type," grumbled the Major as the spur-line locomotive lugged them out of Granadilla.

"Well, I don't suppose we'll ever see that particular specimen again," Bastion replied, but in this he was a little too optimistic.

They arrived late at Santa Teresa, and, after an indifferent supper, were too tired for anything but bed. Early next morning they set out for the ruins on mounts provided by the innkeeper. Bastion refused to employ a guide. He did not want to be hampered by the attentions of a local resident.

The two friends rode in silence. The horses, given a general

direction, picked their own way along rough tracks that climbed and descended and climbed again

At last, as they rounded the shoulder of a tall hill, Bastion pointed out what seemed to be a great heap of rubble on the floor of a narrow valley. The steep hills were thickly covered with cactus.

Now the horses found a descending path. It was painfully hot under the sun by the time the travellers reached the ruins. They dismounted, and Bastion led the way through shattered halls until he came to the spot where he had found the skull. Here he pointed to a shallow, rubble-filled well beneath a shelf of masonry. Bevis poked about with a stick as though he expected to find something.

Bastion climbed the eastern wall of the palace and peered through a pair of binoculars at the line of hills on that side. The range was much broken by gullies and small canyons, and Bastion seemed uncommonly interested in the panorama. He was humming cheerfully to himself when Bevis joined him on the wall.

The Major, too, was interested in the hills. He looked toward the trail and saw a shifting puff of dust above the screening cacti. He drew Bastion's attention to it. Bastion swung up his binoculars.

"It's that infernal American tourist," he announced.

Bevis groaned.

"We'd better get down and meet him," he suggested. "We can't hide ourselves, anyway. Perhaps he won't stay long."

They climbed down and advanced to the outer wall of the palace. The American came, accompanied by a guide. It was obvious that he at once recognised Bastion and his companion. He wore a child-like look of delight on his round face.

"Well, well!" he shouted. "Look who's here, will you? If I'd thought you folks were coming Teresa way, I'd have given you a lift in my car."

Bastion grinned.

"You evidently haven't run across Baza yet," he said.

"Baza!" The American exploded with laughter and slipped clumsily from his saddle. He was a big man, heavy. "No danger," he protested. "That greaser would never show himself in daylight."

The guide dismounted and took charge of the horses. The American stretched himself and came forward.

"They told me at the inn I'd find a professor of some sort out here," he said, with more laughter. "I guess you're the professor, eh?" He addressed Bastion. "Been giving the old shack the once-over? I was out to Mitla and Cuernavaca to see the real ruins. This here's a small-time show. Maybe you know all about this Aztec junk, eh, Professor?"

"I'm afraid I don't know so very much," answered Bastion.

"Is that so? How about Aztec skulls then?"

Bastion opened his mouth in surprise. For three seconds Bevis stood like a petrified tree. Then, with a jerk of his arm he reached for a pocket where he kept a revolver. He was too late. He found himself looking into the muzzle of a Browning pistol. Bastion was forced to concentrate on a companion piece.

"Hola!" yelled the big man, and, from the middle distance where they had been waiting under cover of scrub and rubble, sprang six or seven Mexicans with rifles. In two minutes Bastion and the Major had their arms bound behind their backs with thin ropes.

A grim-faced ruffian searched the Professor's pockets and then relieved Bevis of his revolver.

"That is all, Señor Al," he said.

Señor Al turned to his still surprised captives.

"Well, you couple of boobs," he mocked them. "You'll know a bit more about Miguel Baza before you're many hours older."

Horses were brought from hiding in a gully, Bastion and Bevis were bundled on to their own mounts, and, with Señor Al leading, the cavalcade started into the hills, away from the direction of Santa Teresa.

For the best part of two hours they climbed a tortuous path, and the journey was the more painful for the prisoners because of their bonds. Then came a brief respite. They were given water and allowed to rest on the ground. Next, at a signal from the leader, they were blindfolded, hoisted to saddles again, and taken on another stage of their journey.

Bevis lost all count of time. It seemed to him that they rode for days without pause, alternately upward and downward. Actually they must have been another hour in the saddle. When the bandages were taken from their eyes, they found themselves in a crater-like cup with a mountain wall rising fifty feet above them. The place must have measured some three hundred yards across from wall to wall, and there was no path of egress visible. Close to where they stood was an entrance to a rocky cave. A number of men came from the interior to look at the new arrivals. Presently the captives were taken to an inner cave. A guard was set, and they were told they must wait.

They waited through what remained of the day. In the evening they were supplied with water and clean towels. Their bonds were removed, and, though the bidding was superfluous, they were told to wash. They were, it seemed, to be entertained at dinner by Miguel Baza himself. And Baza awaited them in a rock chamber where a table was laid with silver and passable napery.

From his dress the bandit might have passed as a gentleman rancher, a horseman punctilious about his garb. He wore a well-cut coat, riding breeches, and polished leather leggings. He had an

immaculate air, but it was his dark handsome face that held his guests. He bowed with the characteristic politeness of the educated Mexican.

"I regret exceedingly, gentlemen, that you have been distressed by a painful journey," he said. "You must permit me to make some amends. I shall be glad if you will join me at dinner."

The Major reddened. He was about to break out in angry protest, but Bastion cut in before he could say a word. If the note was to be one of high comedy, the Professor could sound it with just as much assurance as a bandit, even though he were in the relation of captive to captor. Perhaps his response was influenced somewhat by the fact that he was famished. The odours of savoury Mexican cooking were too tempting to resist. He nudged the Major sharply, made a polite reply to Baza, and the three of them sat down to dine.

It was an excellent meal. Even the disgruntled Bevis discovered an appetite, though it did not prevent him from asking questions. His questions became blunter as his host fenced him off, but at last, when coffee and cognac were served, Baza was ready to talk. He gave a signal to the man who had been serving the food and the fellow brought in the Aztec skull.

"You wish to know why you have been brought here, gentlemen," said Baza. "Here is the reason: this skull that you are both familiar with. There is a puzzle upon it that intrigues me. From your recent movements, I am led to believe that you can solve the puzzle, that you have, in fact, solved it. You are here, gentlemen, to give me the answer to the riddle."

"I'm afraid you're under a misapprehension, señor," answered Bastion.

"I trust not, Professor. I am exceedingly anxious about your comfort. Here in the hills we are a simple people. We cleave to simplicity. We reduce most of our problems to very bald terms—ransom or death. My children in their naiveté have decided that your ransom shall be the answer to a riddle. They give you till dawn to find the answer. They have a tendency to set the hour of sunrise as a limit to discussion. It is one of their amusing traditions. I do not know the origin of it. As their leader I am necessarily the keeper of their traditions, the slave, if you like. My wish is to deliver you safely back to your inn at Santa Teresa. I hope you will not hamper me in my good intentions."

"You won't get your ransom out of us," growled the Major. "We haven't got it to pay."

"Come now, Major Bevis! You are an engineer. What is the meaning of this triangle on the skull?"

"How should I know? You'd better consult Euclid."

"And yet, after examining the skull in Mexico City, you hurry

to the place where it was found. What have *you* to say, Señor Professor?"

"Only that you know more about it than we do. Why were you so eager to get the skull? Why was a man murdered in our house? Why did he scrawl part of your name on the floor?"

"Part of my name!" Baza was surprised. Then a light of sardonic appreciation flashed in his dark eyes. "So José thought of me as he died. That is a genuine compliment. I am touched. But now I must leave you to your problem, gentlemen. You have till dawn."

The bandit was plainly convinced that they had solved the puzzle. He had faith in his method of torture. He believed that the threat of death would bring him the required information. But even if they were in a position to give him that information, would it bring them release? Bevis doubted it very much.

Till dawn— They were taken back to their prison in the rock. They were tied up with ropes. A rough-looking guard placed a hurricane-lamp on a ledge near the entrance to the inner cave, and settled down, his rifle across his thighs.

Bevis pondered the recent scene. The Professor had examined the skull very carefully. Once a gleam had come into the pale blue eyes behind the gig-lamp glasses. In the shadows Bevis moved till he was close to his friend.

"Did you discover anything about the skull?" he asked.

Bastion jerked himself on to his side.

"The irregular line roughly follows the hills we saw from the palace this morning," he answered. "I wasn't sure about it until Baza gave me the chance to check it up."

So the secret lay hidden in the valley whence they had been brought to this place. Baza had suspected that much, but with the fact definitely established, they might bargain with him. They might cause him to take them back to the valley.

Bastion had a similar thought. It was perhaps important to gain time. When Decond heard of their disappearance, he might be able to do something. The man Gomez might yield important information. Even now Señor Valentín—or Decond himself—might be following their trail to the stronghold.

The Professor moved, thinking to communicate this thought to Bevis. Then, in the dim light from the hurricane-lamp, he saw that Bevis had got his hands free. The guard, nodding over his rifle, was unsuspecting. Already Bevis was fumbling at the knots that held his companion helpless. In less than a minute the Professor was unbound, and they were both creeping slowly, cautiously towards the sentry.

It seemed an interminable time before Bevis leaped forward. He seized the man, clapping one hand over his mouth to smother any

sound he might try to make. Then Bastion worked quickly to bind him with the ropes they had cast off while Bevis improvised a gag and secured it in the fellow's mouth.

They had moved instinctively, out of desperation, and now it did not seem that their plight was greatly improved. Yet the excitement of their act had heartened them.

"What next?" asked the Professor as Bevis picked up the bandit's rifle and searched his pockets for cartridges.

"We can make a dash for the open," answered the Major. "Most of the gang will be asleep, and we might find a way out."

Creeping noiselessly, they ventured forward. Some yards ahead they could see the main entrance to the system of caves.

They paused, undecided what to do. Then the Professor jumped as a sudden sound broke the silence of the night.

Crack of a rifle, a cry, a second shot!

"What is it?" gasped Bastion. "What is it?"

And the answer returned to him was a spluttering volley from just beyond the entrance to the cave. There followed a confusion of shouts, men's voices raised in imprecations. Figures started out of the blackness and dashed for the open. There were more shots, many shots. Sharp words of command punctuated a medley of cries and groans.

"It's Valentín—or Decond!" declared the Professor, and it was, in fact, both of them, supported by a numerous company of troopers. Gomez, one of the rebels against Baza, had betrayed his former chief, and the stronghold that had seemed impregnable was made into a trap.

The rurales gave the bandits all the fight they would take and then secured their prisoners. The police chief himself found Bastion and the Major in one of the caves, whither they had retreated for safety.

And soon after the dawn Bastion and the Major were once more in the valley of the Aztec ruins. Decond and Valentín were with them and so was Gomez, in the custody of four rurales. Decond had the skull in his hands, but when he questioned Gomez about it, the man refused to answer.

"Basta!" he cried. "I've done enough. I've earned my freedom. The rest is for you."

"But you know what this triangle means," insisted Decond, pointing to the plan on the skull.

"I have not seen it before. When I had it within my reach, Baza struck. His men killed my comrade José in the house of the little man with the big spectacles. That's why I led you against Baza."

Bevis touched Decond's sleeve.

"We can't make the man talk," he grumbled. "But we can follow up the Professor's clue. If the indented line represents those

hills, then the baseline of the triangle leads to that deep arroyo across the valley. The triangle is intended to be equilateral. By measuring the base, we can find the apex. We'll start from these ruins. They're undoubtedly the rectangle on the skull."

Counting his steps, Bevis strode across the floor of the valley, the others following. When he reached a point opposite the arroyo, he estimated the baseline as slightly more than nine hundred paces. The rest was easy enough. Consulting his pocket compass, Bevis led the way to the apex, and, as he walked, looked for something to correspond to the branched figure in the diagram. He found it in a giant cactus that towered above other growths, and the next step was to take the direction indicated by the arrow.

Up the hill they toiled, and they knew then that they must look for a cave. There was a light of impotent rage in the single eye of Gomez, and he cursed passionately as he was forced to make the ascent.

It was one of the troopers who found the cave. The interior was pitch dark, but a few matches were sufficient to reveal its secret. Piled on the floor was box upon box made of stout wood and bound with iron. In the light of the first match the Professor saw official-looking seals. He tried the weight of a box, but could not shift it.

"*Santa Virgen!*" exclaimed Decond. "This is the loot Baza took from the North-Western silver train. Over this the bandits quarrelled and fought. But how did Baza lose it?"

He held up the match he had struck and the dying flame cast a light on the scarred face of the sinister *vaquero*. The rage of Gomez was gone. He had some queer fatalism that banished it. He had wanted to keep the secret of this loot. Now that it was known, his reason for silence about other things was removed. Outside in the sunlight he told his story.

Baza had entrusted his lieutenant, Pedro, with the raid on the silver train. It was an opportunity for which Pedro had waited a long time. He picked his men carefully, men who would follow him against Baza, and Gomez was one of them. Pedro got away with his loot and hid it. He was prepared to defy Baza, but Baza, warned of treachery, caught the main band of rebels in the valley and destroyed them. Gomez and a few others had been assigned by Pedro to cover the retreat of the raiding party from the point where the treasure had been seized. They appeared upon the scene of Baza's vengeance. Baza scattered and pursued them. Struck by a bullet and left for dead, Gomez crawled to the ruined palace to seek a hiding-place. He came upon Pedro, mortally wounded, and Pedro had whispered something about a message on a skull, whispered it as he died.

Then, after Gomez had met the remnant of his scattered rear-guard, it was discovered that none knew where the treasure was.

hidden. Gomez told his companions of Pedro's last words, and they went to the ruins to search for the skull. They had observed the departure of Professor Bastion from the palace, and when they failed to find the skull they concluded that the little man must have taken it. There had followed the various attacks upon the Professor, but the affair of the taxi in Mexico City had been arranged by Baza, who by that time was on the trail. And then Baza's men must have shadowed José when he went to the Professor's house in a final attempt to secure the skull. Perhaps in his moment of triumph José had been struck down. But now Gomez had avenged his comrade.

"How did Baza get to know about the skull?" asked the Professor.

"Through treachery," answered Gomez. "When we were frightened away from the inn at Santa Teresa, one man went back to Baza crying for pardon. Others followed him, and in the end only José remained true to me. But the traitors are punished. Some are dead, killed by the rurales in the battle. The rest ride that way."

He pointed

Down the valley path the troopers were leading their bandit prisoners towards Santa Teresa. Baza, stiffly upright in the saddle and firmly secured to the horse on which he had been placed, was near the head of the procession. Close to him rode Señor Al, his broad shoulders slumping, his head down. Baza sat in stiff pride, but none of his men had the spirit to imitate him. The procession had the air of a funeral cortège. It passed.

Hercules Popeau

POPEAU INTERVENES

By

MRS BELLOC LOWNDES

PROLOGUE

"THIS is dear, delightful Paris! Paris, which I love, Paris, where I have always been so happy with Bob. It's foolish of me to feel depressed. I've nothing to be depressed about—"

Such were the voiceless thoughts which filled the mind of Lady Waverton as she walked down one of the platforms of the vast grey Gare du Nord on a hot, airless, July night. She formed one of a party of three, the other two being her husband, Lord Waverton, and a beautiful Russian emigrée, Countess Filenska, with whom they had become friends. It was the lovely Russian who had persuaded the Wavertons to take a little jaunt to Paris "on the cheap," that is without maids and valet. The Countess had drawn a delightful picture of an old hostelry on the left bank of the Seine called the Hotel Paragon, where they would find pleasant quiet rooms.

Perhaps the journey had tired the charming, over-refined woman her friends called Gracie Waverton. Yet this morning she had looked as well and happy as she ever did look, for she was not strong, and for some time past she had felt that she and her husband, whom in her gentle, reserved way, she loved deeply, were drifting apart. Like all very rich men, Lord Waverton had a dozen ways of killing time in which his wife could play no part. Still, according to modern ideas, they were a happy couple.

It did not take long for the autobus to glide across Paris at this time of the night, and when they turned into the quiet *cul de sac*, across the end of which rose the superb eighteenth-century mansion which had been the town palace of one of Marie Antoinette's platonic adorers, Monsieur le Duc de Paragon, Lady Waverton lost her vague feeling of despondency. There was something so cheery, as well as truly welcoming, about Monsieur and Madame Bonchamp, mine host and his wife, and she was enchanted with the high-ceilinged, panelled rooms, which had been reserved for their party, and which overlooked a spacious leafy garden.

As Lady Waverton and her Russian friend kissed each other good-night, the Englishwoman exclaimed, "You didn't say a word too much, Olga. This is a delightful place!"

I

"ROBERT? This is *too* exquisite! You are the most generous man in the world!"

Olga Filenska was gazing, with greedy eyes, at an open blue velvet-lined jewel-case containing a superb emerald pendant.

"I'm glad you like it, darling——"

Lord Waverton seized the white hand, and made its owner put what it held on a table near which they both stood. Then he clasped her in his arms, and their lips met and clung together.

The secret lovers were standing in the centre of the large, barely-furnished *salon*, which belonged to the private suite of rooms which had been reserved for the party, and they felt secure from sudden surprise by a high screen which masked the door giving into the corridor.

At last, releasing her, he moodily exclaimed, "Why did you make me bring my wife to Paris? It spoils everything, and makes me feel, too, such a cad!"

"Remember my reputation, Robert. It is all I have left of my vanished treasures."

He caught her to him again, and once more kissed her long and thirstily.

"My God, how I love you!" he said in a strangled whisper. "There's nothing, nothing, *nothing* I wouldn't do, to have you for ever as my own!"

"Is that really true?" she asked with a searching look.

"Haven't I offered to give up everything, and make a bolt? It's you who refuse to do the straight thing."

"Your wife," he murmured in a low bitter tone, "would never divorce you. She thinks divorce wicked."

"If I'm willing to give up my country, and everything I care for—for love of you, why shouldn't you do as much for me?"

To that she made no answer, only sighed, and looked at him appealingly.

What would each of them have felt had it suddenly been revealed that their every word had been overheard, and each passionate gesture of love witnessed by an invisible listener and watcher? Yet such was the strange, and the almost incredible, fact. Hercules Popeau, but lately retired on a pension from the Criminal Investigation Branch of the *Préfecture de Police*, had long made the Hotel Paragon his home, and his comfortable

study lay to the right of the stately octagon *salon* which terminated Lord and Lady Waverton's suite of rooms

Popeau had lived in the splendid seventeenth-century house for quite a long time, before he had discovered—with annoyance rather than satisfaction—that just behind the arm-chair in which he usually sat, and cleverly concealed in the wainscoting, was a slanting sliding panel which enabled him both to hear and see everything that went on in the next room. This sinister “Judas,” as it was well called, dated from the days of Louis the Fifteenth, when a diseased inquisitiveness was the outstanding peculiarity of both the great and the humble, even the King would spend his leisure in reading copies of the love letters intercepted in the post, of those of his faithful subjects who were known to him

Hercules Popeau had been closely connected with the British army during the great war, and he remembered that Lord Waverton, then little more than a boy, had performed an act of signal valour at Beaumont Hamel. That fact had so far interested him in the three tourists, as to have caused him to watch the party while they had sat at dinner in their private sitting-room the evening following their arrival in Paris. The famous secret agent was very human and he had taken a liking to fragile-looking Lady Waverton, and a dislike to her lovely Russian friend. The scene he was now witnessing confirmed his first judgment of the Countess Filenska.

“I wish Gracie were not here!” exclaimed Lord Waverton.

“She is—how do you call it?—too much thinking of herself to think of us,” was the confident answer of Lady Waverton's false friend.

There came a look of discomfort and shame over the man's face. “You women are such damn good actresses! Then you think Gracie is really ill this morning?”

“‘Ill’ is a big word. Still, she is willing to see a doctor. It is fortunate that I know a very good Paris physician. He will be here very soon, but she wants us to start for Versailles now, before he comes.”

“All right! I'll go and get ready.”

When she believed herself to be absolutely alone, Countess Filenska walked across to the long mirror between the two windows and stood there, looking at herself in the bright light with a close dispassionate scrutiny.

Hercules Popeau, as he gazed at her through his hidden “Judas,” told himself that though in his time he had been brought in contact with many beautiful women, rarely had he seen so exquisite a creature as was Olga Filenska. While very dark, she had no touch of swarthiness, and her oval face had the luminosity

of a white camellia petal. She had had the courage to remain unshingled, and the Frenchman, faithful to far away memories of youth, visioned the glorious mantle her tightly coiled hair must form when unbound. Her figure, at once slender and rounded, was completely revealed, as is the fashion to-day, by a plain black dress.

Was she really Russian? Hercules Popeau shook his head. That southern type of beauty is unmistakable. He had known a Georgian princess who might have been the twin sister of the woman he saw before him now.

The hidden watcher's lifelong business had been to guess the innermost thoughts of men and women. But he felt he had no clue as to what was making this dark lady smile, as she was doing now in so inscrutable a way, at herself.

At last she turned round and left the room, and at once her unseen admirer, and, yes, judge, closed the tiny slit in the panelled wall.

What a curious, romantic, and yes, sinister page, he had just turned in the great Book of Life! A page of a not uncommon story, that of a beautiful, unscrupulous woman, playing the part of serpent in a modern Garden of Eden.

It was clear that Lord Waverton was infatuated with this lovely creature, but there had been no touch of genuine passion in her seductive voice, or even in her apparently eager response to his ardour.

Hercules Popeau had a copy of the latest *Who's Who?* on his writing table, and he opened the section containing the letter W.

The entry he sought for, began "Waverton, Robert Hichfield, of Hichfield, York. Second Baron."

And then there came back to him the knowledge that this man's father had been one of the greatest of Victorian millionaires. No wonder he had been able to present the woman he loved in secret with that magnificent jewel!

There came the sounds of a motor drawing up under the huge *porte-cochère* of the Hotel Paragon, and, rising, the Frenchman went quickly over to the open window on his right.

Yes, there was a big car, the best money could hire, with his lordship standing by the bonnet. Waverton looked the ideal "Milord" of French fancy, for he was a tall, broad man, with fair hair having in it a touch of red.

Just now he was obviously impatient and ill at ease. But he had not long to wait, for in a very few moments Countess Filenska stepped out of the great house into the courtyard. Even in her plain motor bonnet she looked entrancingly lovely.

Popeau took a step backwards from his window, as there floated

upwards the voices of the two people whose secret he now shared

"Did you see Gracie?" asked Lord Waverton abruptly

"Yes and she was so sweet and kind! She begs us not to hurry back, and she is quite looking forward to the visit of my old friend, Dr Scorpion"

Scorpion? A curious name—not a happy name—for a medical man Hercules Popeau remembered that he had once known a doctor of that name

"Are you ready, Olga?"

"Quite ready, *mon ami*," and she smiled up into his face

A moment later they were side by side, and Lord Waverton took the wheel

As the motor rolled out on to the boulevard, the Frenchman went back to his desk, and, taking up the speaking-tube, he whistled down it.

"Madame Bonchamp? I have something important to say to you" He heard the quick answer. "At your service always, Monsieur"

"Listen to me!"

"I am listening"

"A doctor is coming to see Lady Waverton this morning *Before* he sees Miladi, show him yourself into my bedroom"

There came a surprised, "Do you feel ill, Monsieur?"

"I am not very well, and I have reason to think this doctor is an old friend of mine *But I do not wish him to know that he is not being shown straight into the bedroom of his English lady patient* Have I made myself clear?"

He heard her eager word of assent Madame Bonchamp was as sharp as a needle, and she had once had reason to be profoundly grateful to Hercules Popeau He knew he could trust her absolutely, sometimes he called her, by way of joke, "Madame Discretion."

II

HERCULES POPEAU always did everything in what he called to himself an artistic—an Englishman would have said a thorough—way Before getting into bed, he entirely undressed, and then drew together the curtains of his bedroom window Thus any one coming into the room from the corridor would feel as if in complete darkness, while to one whose eyes were already accustomed to the dim light, everything would be perfectly clear

The time went by slowly, and he had already been in bed half an hour, when at last the door of the room opened, and he heard Madame Bonchamp exclaim "*Entrez, Monsieur le Docteur!*"

And then his heart gave a leap, for the slight elderly individual who had just been shown into the darkened room, was undoubtedly the man he had known twenty years ago

Quickly the ex-secret agent told himself that as the doctor had been about thirty years of age when he had got into the very serious trouble which had brought him into touch with the then Chief of the French Criminal Investigation Department, he must now be fifty

With a sardonic look on his powerful face Hercules Popeau watched his visitor grope his way forward into the darkened room

"Miladi," he said at last, in an ill-assured tone, "I will ask your permission to draw the curtains a little? Otherwise, I cannot see you" He put his hat on a chair as he spoke, and then he went towards the nearest window, and pulled apart the curtains

Letting in a stream of light, he turned towards the bed When he saw that it was a man, and not a woman who was sitting up there, he gave a slight gasp of astonishment

"It is a long time since we have met, is it not, my good Doctor Scorpion?"

For a moment Popeau thought that the man who stood stock still, staring at him as if petrified, was about to fall down in a faint And a feeling of regret, almost of shame, came over him—for he was a kindly man—at having played the other such a trick

But the visitor made a great effort to regain his composure, and at last with a certain show of valour, he exclaimed "I have been shown into the wrong room I came here to see an English lady, who is ill"

"That is so," said Popeau quietly "But I, too, feel ill, and hearing that you had been called to this hotel, I thought I would like to see you first, and ask your advice I confess I rather hoped you were the Dr Scorpion I had once known"

To the unfortunate man who stood in the middle of the large room there was a terrible edge of irony in the voice that uttered those quiet words

"Of course, I know, that is in the old days, you were more accustomed to diagnose the condition of an ailing woman than that of a man," went on the ex-police chief pitilessly

And then he changed his tone "Come, come!" he exclaimed "I have no right to go back to the past Draw a chair close up to my bed, and tell me how you have got on all these years?"

With obvious reluctance the doctor complied with this almost command "I have now been in very respectable practice for some time," he said in a low voice

He waited a moment, then he added bitterly "Can you wonder that seeing you gave me a moment of great discomfort

and pain, reminding me, as this meeting must do, of certain errors of my youth of which I have repented "

"I am glad to hear you have repented," said Popeau heartily

In a clearer, calmer tone, Scorpion went on "I made a good marriage, I have a sweet wife, and two excellent children "

"Good! Good!"

Hercules Popeau's manner altered He felt convinced that this man's account of himself was substantially true And yet? And yet a doubt remained

"Are you always called in to the clients of this hotel?" he asked suddenly

The other hesitated, and the ex-police chief again felt a touch of misgiving

"No, I am not the regular medical attendant of the Hotel Paragon," answered Scorpion at last "But I've been here before, and oddly enough," he concluded jauntily, "to see another foreign lady "

"Then who sent for you now, to-day?"

Again the doctor did not answer at once, but when he did speak it was to say, with a forced smile "A lady whom I attended for a quinsy, the last time she was in this hotel It is to see a friend of hers that I am here "

The doctor's statement fitted in with what he, Hercules Popeau, knew to be true Yet something—a kind of sixth sense which sometimes came to his aid—made Popeau tell his visitor a lie of which he was ashamed

"Although I know seeing me again must have revived sore memories, I am glad to have seen you, Scorpion, and to have heard that the past is dead Now tell me if I can safely go off to-night to Niorte, where I am to spend the rest of this hot summer?"

The doctor at once assumed a professional manner He peered into his new patient's throat, he felt his new patient's pulse, and at last he said gravely "Yes, you can leave Paris to-night, though it might be more prudent to stay till to-morrow morning "

"Now that you have reassured me, I shall go to-night "

Then Dr Scorpion asked, almost in spite of himself, a question "Are you still connected with the police, Monsieur Popeau?"

"No, I took my pension at the end of the war, and I am now a rolling stone, for I have not the good fortune, like you, to be married to a woman I love Also, alas! I am not a father " He waited a moment. "And now for what the British call a good hand-shake "

He held out his hand, and then felt a sensation of violent recoil, for it was as if the hand he held was a dead hand Though to-day

was a very hot day, that hand was icy cold—an infallible sign of shock

The ex-member of the dreaded *Sûreté* felt a touch of sharp remorse. He had nothing in him of the feline human being who likes to play with a man or a woman as a cat plays with a mouse.

As soon as he had dressed himself Hercules Popeau spoke down his speaking-tube. "Has the doctor left?" he asked casually.

"Yes, some minutes ago."

He went down to the office, and drew a bow at a venture. "You knew Dr. Scorpion before, eh?"

Madame Bonchamp said in a singular tone. "The Countess Filenska and that little doctor have been great friends for a long time. Beauty sometimes likes Ugly, and Ugly always likes Beauty."

Popeau had meant to go upstairs again, but after that casual word or two instead of going upstairs, he walked out of the hotel.

Sauntering along, he crossed a bridge, and came at last to the big building, the very name of which fills every Parisian's heart with awe.

Now there is a small, almost hidden, door in the Préfecture of Police which is only used by the various heads of departments. It was through this door that Popeau went up to his former quarters, being warmly greeted on the way by various ex-colleagues with whom he had been popular.

Soon he was in the familiar room where are kept the secret *dossiers*, or records which play so important a part in the lives of certain people, and very soon there was laid before him an envelope with the name of *Victor Alger Scorpion* inscribed on it. Glancing over the big sheet of copy paper he saw at once the entry concerning the serious affair in which Scorpion had been concerned some twenty years before. And then came *General Remarks*.

"Victor Alger Scorpion has made a great effort to become respectable. He is living a quiet, moral life with his wife and two children, and to the latter he is passionately devoted. But it is more than suspected that now and again he will take a serious risk in order to make a big sum of money to add to his meagre savings. *Such risks are always associated with——*"

Then followed three capital letters with whose meaning Hercules Popeau was acquainted, though he had never been directly in touch with that side of the police force which concerns itself specially with morals.

He read on

"Just after the end of the war, Scorpion was concerned with the mysterious death of a young Spanish lady. But though he was under grave suspicion, it was impossible actually to prove anything against him, also the fact that he had done even more than his duty as a surgeon in the war, benefited him in the circumstances. He was, however, warned that he would be kept under observation. Since then there has been nothing to report."

II

LORD and Lady Waverton and their friend had arrived on a Saturday night, and Dr Scorpion's first visit to the hotel had been paid on the Monday morning. As the days went on, Lady Waverton, while still keeping to her room, became convalescent, though the doctor recommended that her ladyship should go on being careful till she was to leave Paris, on the following Saturday.

Hercules Popeau, who had constituted himself a voluntary prisoner, cursed himself for a suspicious fool. Cynically he told himself that though martial infidelity is extremely common, murder is comparatively rare.

On the Friday morning Madame Bonchamp herself brought up his *petit déjeuner*. She looked anxious and worried. "Miladi is worse," she said abruptly. "I have already telephoned for the doctor. The Countess Filenska is greatly distressed! I must hurry, now, as I have to serve an English breakfast for two in the next room at once."

A few minutes later Popeau, peeping through the slanting "Judas," sat watching Lord Waverton and his beautiful companion. After having exchanged a long passionate embrace, they sat down, but the excellent omelette provided by Madame Bonchamp remained untasted for a while.

"I don't see why you should be going to England to-day!" exclaimed Lord Waverton.

She said firmly, "It is imperative that I should see the picture dealer who will start for Russia to-morrow."

"Well then, if you must go"—he had the grace to look ashamed—"I don't see why I shouldn't go, too, darling? Gracie hates to have me about when she's ill, and I can't help thinking that the sensible thing to do would be to get a trained nurse over from England. I've only got to telephone to my mother to have a nurse here by to-morrow morning."

The Countess looked violently disturbed "I know Gracie would not like that!" she exclaimed

She was pouring some black coffee into her cup, and Popeau saw that the lovely hand shook "You cannot do better than leave Gracie in my French doctor's hands," she went on "I was seriously ill here last year, and he was wonderful!"

There came a knock at the door, and the man to whom his ex-patient had just given such a good character, came into the sitting-room

Dr Scorpion was pale, but composed "I am indeed sorry," he began, "to hear that my patient is worse——"

The Countess cut him short, almost rudely "Let us go to her," she cried, and together they left the room But in a few moments she came back, alone

"Gracie is much better," she observed "She will probably be able to go home Friday"

She put her hand caressingly through Lord Waverton's arm "I will go over to England to-day at four o'clock, and I will be back here by to-morrow night What do you say to *that* for devotion?"

Her lover's face cleared "Does that mean——"

"——that I am a foolish woman? That I do not like being away from you even for quite a little while? Yes, it does mean that!"

She submitted—the unseen watcher thought with a touch of impatience—to his ardent caresses

Suddenly the door behind the screen opened The two sprang apart, and, as the doctor edged his way in again, Lord Waverton left the room

"What have you come back to tell me?" said the Countess sharply

Scorpion looked at her fixedly "Is it true that Madame la Comtesse is going away to England to-day?"

"I am returning to Paris at once," she said evasively

"I have thought matters over, and I refuse to go on with the treatment before payment, or part payment, is made," he said firmly

"Come! Don't be unreasonable!" she exclaimed

He answered at once, in a fierce, surly tone "I refuse to risk my head unless it is made worth my while I did not think it possible that you meant to leave me to face a terrible danger alone"

"I tell you that I am coming back to-morrow night! Also it is absolutely true that I have no money—as yet"

"Surely the Milord would give you some money? Cannot you invent something which requires at once an advance of say——"

he hesitated, then slowly uttered the words, "fifty thousand francs "

Popeau expected to hear a cry of protest, but the beautiful woman who now stood close to the ugly, clever-looking little doctor, opened her handbag and said coldly "I have something here which is worth a great deal more than fifty thousand francs," and she handed him the jewel-case which contained the emerald pendant

Scorpion opened the case "Is the stone real?" he asked suspiciously

"Fool!" she said angrily, "walk into the first jeweller's shop you pass by, offer it for sale, and see "

He was looking at the gorgeous stone with glistening, avid eyes Slowly he shut the jewel-case and put it in his pocket "I know where I can dispose of it, should it become necessary that I should do so "

"Then you will keep your promise?"

There was a long pause Then the doctor produced a loose-leaved prescription block

"I will fulfil my promise," he said firmly, "if you will write on this sheet of paper what I dictate "

He handed her a fountain pen

"My dear friend and doctor I beg you to accept the jewel I am sending you, a square-cut emerald, which is my own property to dispose of, in consideration of the great care and kindness you showed me when I was so extremely ill last year—Your ever grateful, Olga Filenska "

She hesitated for what seemed both to the invisible watcher, and to her accomplice, a long time But at last she wrote out the words he again dictated, and he put the piece of paper in the pocket where already reposed the small jewel-case

"*C'est entendu*," he exclaimed, and turned towards the door

A moment later Hercules Popeau took off his telephone receiver "Invent a pretext to keep the doctor till I come down!" he exclaimed

Then, taking out of a drawer a large sheet of notepaper headed *Préfecture de Police, Paris*, he wrote on it

"Madame la Comtesse

You are in grave danger The man you are employing to rid you of your rival is affiliated to the French Police He has revealed your plot An affidavit sworn by him will reach Scotland Yard in the course of to-morrow A copy of the

sworn statement of Dr Scorpion will also be laid before Lord Waverton, who will be summoned to appear as a witness at the extradition proceedings. An admirer of your beauty thinks it kind to warn you that you will be well advised to break your journey to-day, and proceed to some other destination than England. The value of the jewel which I enclose is eight hundred pounds sterling. Lord Waverton paid for it close on two thousand pounds."

He put this letter in a drawer, and then went down to the hall of the hotel.

Dr Scorpion was chatting to Madame Bonchamp, and looked startled and disturbed when he saw Hercules Popeau coming to wards him.

"I found Niorte dull, so I came back to Paris," said the latter genially. "How is your patient, my good Scorpion?"

"Going on fairly," said the other hesitatingly. "Though not well enough to leave the hotel this week, as she had hoped to do. Well! Now I must be off——"

"I have a further word to say to you, Scorpion."

Popeau's voice had become cold and very grave. "Come upstairs to my rooms."

Scorpion stumbled up the staircase of the grand old house, too frightened, now, to know what he was doing, or where he was going.

When they reached the corridor, the other man took hold of his shoulder, and pushed him through into his study. Then he locked the door, and turning, faced his abject visitor.

"The first thing I ask you to do is to put on the table the emerald which has just been given you as the price of blood."

"The emerald?"

Scorpion was shaking, now, as if he had the ague. "What do you mean?" he faltered, "I know nothing of any emerald."

"Come—come! Don't be a fool."

A look of rage came over the livid face. "Does that woman dare to call me a thief?" he exclaimed. "See what she herself wrote when she gave me this jewel!"

With a shaking hand he drew a folded sheet of paper from his pocket.

"I want that, too, of course."

Scorpion sank down on to a chair. He asked himself seriously if Hercules Popeau was in league with the Devil?

The ex-police chief came and stood over him. "Listen carefully to what I am going to say. It is important."

The wretched man looked up, his eyes full of terror, while Popeau went on, tonelessly.

"Once more I am going to allow you to escape the fate which is your due. Last time it was for the sake of your mother. This time it will be for the sake of two women—your good wife, and the unfortunate lady whom you, or perhaps I ought to say, your temptress and accomplice, had doomed to a hideous death by poison."

Scorpion stared at Hercules Popeau. His face had gone the colour of chalk.

"Get up!"

The unhappy man stood up on his trembling legs.

"Just now you dictated a letter to your accomplice, and I now dictate to you the following confession."

He placed a piece of notepaper on his writing-table, and forced the other man to go and sit down in his own arm-chair. Then, slowly, he dictated the following!

"I, Victor Scorpion, confess to having entered into a conspiracy with a woman I know under the name of the Countess Filenska, to bring about the death of Lady Waverton on——"

Popeau stopped his dictation and looked fixedly at Scorpion.

"What day was she to die?" he asked.

Scorpion stared woefully at his tormentor. He did not, he felt he could not, answer.

"Must I repeat my question?"

In a whimpering voice he said, "I did not mean that she should die."

"What was the exact proposal made to you?"

Twice the man moistened his lips, then at last he answered, "Five hundred pounds sterling within a fortnight of—of the accident, and ten thousand pounds sterling within six months of the Countess's marriage to Lord Waverton."

"To your mind I suppose the emerald represented the five hundred pounds?"

"She was going away," murmured Scorpion. "I might not have got anything, the more so that I did not mean the poor Miladi to die."

"On what day did the Countess expect her victim to die?"

Popeau had to bend down to hear the two words. "Next Friday."

"I see. Write down the following."

"I was to receive five hundred pounds sterling on the day of her death, and within six months of the Countess's marriage to Lord Waverton ten thousand pounds sterling, whatever the

rate of exchange might be at the time (Signed) Victor Alger
Scorpion

"Do allow me to put down that I did not intend to carry out this infamous plan?" asked the unhappy wretch pleadingly

Popeau hesitated a moment "No," he said firmly, "I will not allow you to do that But this I will promise Within a few hours from now, you yourself shall do what you wish with that piece of paper"

"And the emerald?" said Scorpion in a faltering voice

"The emerald," said Popeau thoughtfully, "will be returned to its owner I regret that necessity almost as much as you do But it is to your interest, Scorpion, as to that of others concerned, that the Countess Filenska should have enough to live on till she has found another lover"

"Perhaps you are right," muttered Scorpion sadly

"Of course I am right! And now," went on Popeau, "you can make yourself at home in these two rooms for a while, and you can have the use of my bathroom also, should you care to take a bath"

He smiled genially "You may telephone home to your wife, saying you will not be home till late"

"Can I trust you?" asked his prisoner "Remember that I am a father It was for the sake of my dear children that I placed myself in this dangerous position!"

"I have never yet betrayed any human being," said Hercules Popeau seriously "I am not likely to begin by you, who are such an old——" he hesitated, and then he said "acquaintance"

EPILOGUE

The beautiful cosmopolitan woman, who had made so many warm friends in English society, had just settled herself comfortably in a first-class compartment of the Paris-Calais express She was quite alone, for in July there are few travellers to England So she was rather taken aback when a big man, dressed in a pale grey alpaca suit, suddenly thrust his body and head through the aperture leading into the corridor

"Have I the honour of speaking to Countess Filenska?" he asked

She hesitated a moment Then she saw that he held in his hand a bulky envelope, and involuntarily she smiled From dear foolish Waverton, of course! A *billet doux*, accompanied no doubt by some delightful gift So, "I am the Countess Filenska," she answered

"I have been told to give you this little parcel, Madame la

Comtesse I am glad I had the good fortune to arrive before your train started ”

The Frenchman had a cultivated voice, and a good manner No doubt he was a jeweller She was pleased, being the kind of woman she was, that there need be no question of a gratuity

“ I thank you, monsieur,” she said graciously

He lifted his hat, and went off She thought, but she may have been mistaken, that she heard a chuckle in the corridor

The train started, slowly the traveller broke the seal of the big envelope Yes! As she had half expected, there was a jewel-case wrapped up in a piece of notepaper Eagerly she opened the case, and then came mingled disappointment and surprise, for it only contained the emerald which she had given that morning to Scorpion

With a feeling of sudden apprehension she quickly unfolded the piece of notepaper and then, slowly, with eyes dilated with terror, she read the terrible words written there The warning sent her, maybe, from some old ex-lover, from the Préfecture de Police

Could she leap now, out of the train? No, it was now gathering speed, and she could not afford to risk an accident

Feverishly she counted over her money Yes, she had enough, amply enough to break her journey at Calais, and go on to——?

After a moment's deep thought she uttered aloud the word “ *Berlin* ”

Late that same afternoon Madame Bonchamp opened the door of Hercules Popeau's study “ Milord Waverton,” she murmured nervously, and the Englishman walked into the room

He looked uncomfortable, even a little suspicious He had not been able to understand exactly what was wanted of him, only that a Frenchman, whose name he did not know, desired his presence—at once

He felt anxious Was his wife worse, and was the man who had asked to see him so urgently a specialist called in by the Countess's French doctor?

“ I have a painful, as well as a serious, communication to make to your lordship,” began Hercules Popeau in slow, deliberate tones He spoke with a strong French accent, but otherwise his English was perfect

“ I belong to the French branch of what in England is called the Criminal Investigation Department, and a most sinister fact has just been brought to our notice ”

He looked fixedly—it was a long, searching glance—into the other man's bewildered face And then he felt a thrill of genuine relief His instinct had been right! Lord Waverton, so much was

clear, was quite unconscious of the horrible plot which had had for object that of ridding him of his wife

"The fact brought to our notice," went on Popeau quietly, "does not concern your lordship, it concerns Lady Waverton "

"My wife? Impossible!"

Lord Waverton drew himself up to his full height He looked angry, as well as incredulous

"Lady Waverton," went on the other, "possesses a terrible enemy "

"I assure you," said Lord Waverton coldly, "that the French police have made some absurd mistake My wife is the best of women, kindness itself to all those with whom she comes in contact I may have enemies, she has none "

"Lady Waverton has an enemy," said Popeau positively "And what is more, that enemy intended to compass her death, and indeed nearly succeeded in doing so "

The Englishman stared at the Frenchman He felt as if he was confronting a lunatic

"This enemy of Lady Waverton's laid her plans—for it is a woman—very cleverly," said Popeau gravely "She discovered in this city of Paris a man who will do anything for money That man is a doctor, and for what appeared to him a sufficient consideration, he undertook to poison her ladyship "

He waited a moment, then added in an almost casual tone, "Lady Waverton's death was to have occurred next Friday "

"What!" exclaimed Lord Waverton, in a horror-stricken voice, "do you mean that the little French doctor who has been attending my wife is——"

"——a would-be murderer? Yes," said Hercules Popeau stolidly "Dr Scorpion had undertaken to bring about what would have appeared to everybody here, in the Hotel Paragon, a natural death "

Lord Waverton covered his face with his hands Yet even now no suspicion of the woman who had been behind Scorpion had reached his brain He was trying to remember the name of a French maid his wife had had for a short time soon after their marriage, and who had been dismissed without a character

"Most fortunately for you, Lord Waverton, this infamous fellow-countryman of mine had already had trouble with the police So he grew suddenly afraid, and made a full confession of the hideous plot He brought with him a written proof, as well as a *valuable emerald*, which was part of the price his infamous temptress was willing to pay the man she intended should be the actual murderer "

The speaker turned away, for he desired to spare the unhappy

man, whose sudden quick, deep breathing, showed the awful effect those last words had had on him

"The rest of the blood money—ten thousand pounds sterling—was to be paid when Scorpion's temptress became the second wife of a wealthy English peer"

Lord Waverton gave a strangled cry

"I should now like to show you the proof of the story I have told you I take it you do not desire to see the emerald?"

The other shook his head violently

"That is as well," said Popeau calmly, "for it is once more in the possession of the woman who calls herself the Countess Filenska"

He took out of his pocket the two documents, the deed of gift written out by the Countess, and the confession signed by Scorpion himself

"I will ask you to read these through," he said, "and then I must beg you to put a firm restraint upon yourself I have kept the man here so that he may confirm the fact that the whole of this statement is in his handwriting"

Popeau waited till Lord Waverton had read Scorpion's confession Then he opened the door of his bedroom

"Come here for a moment," he called out in a quick, business-like tone "I have done with that paper I asked you to sign, and I am ready to give you it back the moment you have informed this gentleman that you wrote it"

Scorpion sidled into the room

"Now then," said Popeau sharply, "say in English, 'I, Scorpion, swear that all I wrote down here is true, and that this is my signature'"

The man repeated the words in a faltering voice

Popeau handed him back the confession

"Take this piece of paper," he observed, "down into the courtyard, there set a light to it, and watch it burn, then go home and thank the good God, and your good wife, that you have not begun the long road which leads to the Devil's Island"

After Scorpion had left the room, Hercules Popeau turned to the Englishman "I trust," he said, "that your lordship will not think it impertinent if I ask you to listen to me for yet another two or three minutes?"

Lord Waverton bent his head His face had gone grey under its tan

"I am old enough to be your father, and this I would say to you, and I trust that you will take it in good part There was a time when a man in your position was guarded by high invisible barriers from many terrible dangers Those barriers, Milrod, are no longer there, and——"

There came a knock at the door. A telegram was handed to Lord Waverton. He tore open the envelope.

"An unexpected chance has come my way of getting back to Russia, and of recovering some of my lost property. Good-bye, dear friends. Thank you both for your goodness to an unhappy woman. Dear love to Gracie."

As Lord Waverton handed the two slips of paper to his new friend, Hercules Popeau looked much relieved.

"All you have to do," he exclaimed, "is to show *Milady* this telegram, and then to give her—how do you say it in English?—a good kiss on her sweet face!"

Inspector Head

LOCKED IN

By

E CHARLES VIVIAN

"**T**WENTY-THREE years ago," said Superintendent Wadden, "his father committed suicide I remember, because it was the year after I married And now—well, a family habit, by the look of it"

"Perhaps" Seated beside his chief in the big police saloon, Inspector Head made the rejoinder sound entirely non-committal

"Whaddye mean, man—perhaps?" Wadden snapped, accompanying the query with the glare of his fierce eyes having been turned out at eight in the morning to investigate the reported suicide, he was a trifle short of temper But Head, gazing at the road ahead, wisely ignored both the stare and the question

"It's the next gateway on the right, Jeffries," he said to the driver of the car, "and stop a full 20 yards short of the front door Don't drive up to it"

Laurels, backed by old cedars, hid the house as Jeffries turned the saloon into the drive Two hundred yards or less revealed a tiled Elizabethan roof with spiralling chimneys, and such of the frontage as a gorgeous-leaved virginia creeper let appear showed century-mellowed in tint To the left of the big main doorway two diamond-paned casement windows showed, over and between them was a single first-floor window of similar type and against it a ladder was reared And, Head noted as he got out from the car, no fewer than four of the diamond panes of this first-floor window were broken, and their leaden framing bent aside, as if to admit a hand from without

"Wait, Jeffries—I don't think we shall need you," Wadden said as he got out from the saloon "What about Wells, Head?"

"You'd better come along, sergeant," Head said to the fourth occupant of the car "Bring your outfit, in case we need it"

Thereupon Sergeant Wells followed his two superiors towards the entrance, bearing the black leather case in which reposed a fingerprint detecting outfit and a camera Before Head, leading the way, could pull the big, old-fashioned bell handle beside the doorpost, the door itself swung open, and a stout, fair-haired man frowned out at him before glancing at Wadden and the sergeant

"If you're Press," he snapped, "you can get out I'll give you two policeman particulars for the inquest It's purely formal"

Wadden gave him a glare from his fierce eyes "Oh, is it?" he snapped back "That's Inspector Head you're speaking to, and he'll take charge of the formalities What's your name?"

"Keller," the other man said, far more meekly "Percival Keller Mr Garnham is my half-brother—was, that is, till he shot himself"

"Then, for a start, we'll see the body," Wadden announced "Was it you who telephoned us to come out here?"

"No," Keller answered, standing back for them to enter "That was Kennett, Mr Garnham's man But I told him to telephone"

He gave Head another unregarded, resentful look, as if he were incensed at a mere police inspector masquerading in a well-cut lounge suit instead of appearing in uniform But Head was surveying the magnificently carved staircase that went diagonally across the back of the big square entrance hall, giving access to a gallery that ran along the sides and back of the apartment at first-floor level

"A fine piece of woodwork," he observed, with apparent irrelevance to their task

"Yes," Keller said, ingratiatingly "One of the Garnhams brought it over from Italy in the eighteenth century and put it up here It came from a villa of Alexander Borgia's—his arms are repeated on the newels Three of the doors on the gallery belong with it"

"And now, the body," Head suggested

"I'll take you up," Keller answered "Mere formality, of course We had to break the outside window to get into the room—he'd locked himself in and left the key in the lock"

The three followed him up the staircase and along the left side gallery to a door that appeared as a museum piece—Cellini or Michael Angelo himself might have proportioned it and designed its ornament Keller reached out for the handle, but Head spoke before he touched it

"Who else has turned that handle this morning?" he asked

"Kennett, and Mrs Garnham," Keller answered, readily but with visible irritation "Why? I tell you he'd locked himself in"

"And the keyhole?" Head queried blandly "I see none"

Keller pressed a wooden shield, bearing similar designs to those on the staircase newels, and set quite a foot back from the edge of the door It slid aside, revealing a keyhole a good two inches in length

"I see," Head remarked "Now we can go in"

Again Keller led, and they followed Halfway between the door and the window which Head had seen as broken from outside the

house, lay the body of a delicately featured, scholarly looking man of early middle age, and by it an overturned chair that had stood at a flat-topped writing-desk so angled from the window that the light would fall over the left shoulder of one seated at the knee-hole. Behind the right ear of the prostrate figure was a neat round hole, from which a very little blood had oozed to trickle down to the back of the dead man's neck and there congeal. A small, nickel-plated revolver gleamed ominously from the carpet, and, kneeling, Head took it up by inserting a pencil in the barrel, handing it to Wells, who took hold on the pencil and so avoided touching the weapon itself.

"Has any one handled that thing, do you know?" Head inquired.

Keller shook his head. "Nobody," he answered. "Old Joe, the gardener, got in through the window and unlocked the door for us, and I warned him and Kennett and Mrs. Garnham too, not to touch anything. And the doctor didn't touch it either, I know."

"What doctor?" Wadden put in abruptly.

"Why, his own doctor. Tyrrell, his name is."

"And where is Dr. Tyrrell?" Wadden persisted.

"I told him he needn't stay—he had an urgent confinement case," Keller explained. "He saw all he wanted to see for the inquest."

"Oh, did he?" Wadden snapped. "Well, I'll get Bennett, our own surgeon, out to make a proper examination. You appear to have taken a good deal on yourself, Mr. Keller. What's your jumping-off point, Head?"

"I'll begin on this man Joe," Head answered. "He was first into the room, it seems. Then I can decide whom to take next. Dust that revolver for any fingerprints, Wells——"

"You won't find any," Keller broke in. "He's lying on his right hand, but it's all bandaged up—he scalded it badly two days ago."

"See what you can find, Wells," Head insisted quietly.

"But—to what purpose?" Keller demanded irritably. "I tell you, he locked himself in before he shot himself. Examine the window and then the door—see for yourself that he must have been absolutely alone in here. You're only making the tragedy worse for Mrs. Garnham with all this fuss—this useless fuss!"

"And now?" Head remarked, even more quietly, "perhaps you will be so good as to find this man Joe for me, Mr. Keller. Would you mind?"

II

Down in the big entrance hall, while Wells busied himself over the revolver with his finger-printing outfit, Keller escorted in from the back premises an oldish man, grey-haired and grey-bearded, and himself drew forward a chair as if to become a member of the party

"We shall not need you, Mr Keller," Head told him "Thanks for the trouble you have taken, though"

Without replying, Keller went out Then Joe, the gardener, owned to having been employed here for over forty years, rising from third gardener to headship, and also confessed to the fitting surname of Plant

"And you discovered Mr Garnham's body?" Head asked him

"Saw it through the window, sir," Joe answered "It'd be about seven o'clock this mornin' or a little past seven"

"And how did you happen to be up a ladder outside that window at that time?" Head inquired

"Well, sir, about leavin' off time last night, the master—Mr Garnham, that is—come to me as I was lockin' up my things in the barn, and said if I didn't cut back the creeper round that window he'd soon need a light in the room at midday He told me to make it my first job to-day, but I'd hardly started when I saw him wi' the hole in his skull and the pistol alongside him—"

"Wait a bit," Head interrupted "When you put up that ladder, were there any footprints in the geranium bed under the windows?"

Joe shook his head decidedly "There was not, sir, and there's none now, either I put down boards to prevent either footprints or ladder marks But if you mean did any one climb in or out of that window, sir, I can tell you it was impossible I had to break four panes to shoot back the bolts from the outside, and if any one had got in and closed it from the inside, they'd be still in the room, because the door was locked with the key on the inside"

"Unless Mr Garnham let them out, Joe," Wadden interposed

"Yes, sir, but since both the window and door were fastened inside the room like that, Mr Garnham must have been alone when he shot himself," Joe insisted, respectfully but firmly

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?" Wadden half-soliloquised 'Carry on with what you did, though'

"I got down the ladder, and went in at the back of the house," Joe continued "Cook and Gladys—that's the housemaid—were in the kitchen, and I got Gladys to fetch Kennett, and then told him He said get in by the window, because you'd have to ruin the

door to force it, and unlock the door from the inside. While I was doin' that, he rung for Dr Tyrrell and the police, which was you gentlemen, I take it."

"Did Mr Keller have anything to do with ringing for the doctor and for us?" Head asked after a thoughtful pause.

"No, sir. He hadn't come down, then Kennett went to the telephone here," Joe pointed at the instrument, "while I went out at the front door to break the window and get into the room."

There was thus one—possibly unimportant—error in Keller's account of his own actions, Head reflected.

"And Mrs Garnham—where was she?" he asked.

"I dunno, sir. Not up, I think. Gladys told me before you got here that Mr Keller broke the news to her. I haven't seen her to-day."

"Married—how long?" Head asked next.

"It'll be—September, they were married—yes, three years next month. But I don't see——" He broke off, doubtfully.

"Happily married, of course," Head persisted.

Joe Plant shook his head. "All the years I've been here, sir, I've never gossiped about the family and their affairs," he said.

"Quite right of you," Head approved. "This Mr Keller, though. Do you count him as one of the family?"

"No, I don't." There was sudden heat in the reply. "A double-dyed waster, everlastin'ly spongin' on the master, who was always far too good-natured. His mother was a widow, and he was a kid of five when the master's father married her, and even then he was a little devil. They say he spent every penny she left him, and that was a considerable lot, an' for the last two years he's been no more'n the mistletoe, with the master as the oak. A parasite, an' no more."

"Umm-m! This man Kennett, now?"

"Quite a good chap, sir. He was batman to the master in the war, and been here ever since he was demobbed. Him and I get on well."

"His duties being what?"

"Oh, a bit of secretarying, an' kept the two cars in order, an' looked after the master's clothes. An' he's the only one the master let have the run of that room—the one where the body is—to clean it. The master kept all his books an' papers in there, you see, sir."

"This is an old house, Joe," Wadden put in abruptly, "and old houses are queer, sometimes. Apart from the window and the door, is there any way into that room that you've heard about in your 40 years here?"

"No, sir," Joe answered with unhesitating sincerity. "You mean——"

"Nothing" Head interrupted him "What other servants are there?"

"There's cook, and Gladys I spoke of, an' Rose—she's the parlourmaid An' Mrs Higgs comes over from Todlington three days a week to do rough work—sort of charring"

"Well, I think that's all we want you to tell us, for the present Joe Now send Gladys along to us here, and—do you know the general run of the house, though?"

"Every inch of it, sir"

"Well, when she comes along, I want you to take Sergeant Wells round and show him every room and explain what it's used for That's all, thanks—we have to do these things, you know"

He signed to Wells as the gardener went out

"The bedrooms, Wells—take each one as we handle the occupants, especially Keller's I'm not happy about this at all That pistol?"

"Old-fashioned hammerless Smith and Wesson, Mr Head, 32 bore Only one shot fired No print of any kind on it anywhere"

Head took it from him and inspected it "That muzzle looks very clean for a fired pistol," he observed

"I get you, sir," Wells answered

Head slipped the pistol into his pocket as Gladys entered the room

III

STANDING side by side, Wadden and Head watched while Bennett, the police surgeon, conducted his examination of the body, and Tyrrell the practitioner who had attended Garnham in life and so perfunctorily assumed his death as that of a suicide, also watched, having been summoned back to the house by Wadden Eventually Bennett stood up

"Instantaneous," he said "At some time between eleven last night and one this morning Quite instantaneous—hardly any blood"

"The perfect story-book situation," Wadden observed pensively "Dead man on his own carpet, revolver beside him Would he have fallen like that and dragged the chair over, though?"

"Hard to say," Bennett answered "Reflex muscular action after death is impossible to predicate"

"And he was certainly locked in the room," Wadden observed again "We have done enough questioning and inspecting to be pretty certain there are no secret passages or anything of that sort No chimney, because no fireplace Therefore, Head, if any one else shot him, he got up and locked the door after dying instan-

taneously and letting the other man out, and then came back and lay down again."

"See Euclid on the point," Head said thoughtfully "But—doctor, take another careful look at that hole behind his ear and then come down and out with me. Out into the garden."

He left the room and went downstairs, while Wadden merely went to the window of the room to watch. By the time Bennett got out into the garden Head had arranged a stuffed and mounted antelope head, which he had taken from the entrance-hall, on a sundial.

"Now, watch, doctor," he bade "This"—he took the revolver from his pocket—"is what killed Garnham. See this—the hair is about the same length as Garnham's behind his ear. Now"—he placed the pistol against the stuffed neck and pulled the trigger—"come and examine the hole," he invited, after the faint curl of smoke following on the explosion had drifted away "For a good quarter of an inch round the hole, the hair is badly burned, as you see."

"Yes, I see," Bennett agreed, beginning to understand.

"Now, again. Watch this," Head bade.

With the pistol muzzle a good foot distant from the head, he fired again. Again Bennett examined the hole.

"Diffused scorching," Head pointed out, "and some shrivelled hairs where grains of only partially burned powder struck. A patchy burn, in fact. Now just one more, at about eighteen inches."

With the surgeon watching very intently now, he fired again, and, even with the longer interval between the muzzle of the pistol and the skin, there were traces of burning round the bullet hole.

"Garnham was fair-haired," he remarked, "and there isn't a trace of burning round the bullet hole in his head. You showed us his right hand, and it's a pretty bad scald. Now—I'll hold this pistol only a foot from my own head, which would burn the hair if I pulled the trigger—and now tell me where the muzzle is pointing."

"Ah, you can't see it of course," Bennett answered "The bullet would graze the top of your skull—perhaps. It wouldn't go in behind your ear. And the muzzle isn't nine inches away, let alone a foot."

"Try it yourself, if you like," Head offered.

"Not I! There's another live cartridge in that pistol, isn't there? But I see your point. With that scalded and bandaged hand of his Garnham couldn't have——"

"And, therefore, who did?" Head questioned, after waiting vainly for the end of the remark "Also, what is the third way out of that room?"

"There isn't one," Bennett said "I saw you and the supe examine the room Hallo! Barton! Now who told him Garnham was dead?"

For, passing the police saloon, a car drew up before the entrance to the house, and from it descended Lucas Barton, the principal Westingborough solicitor, with two obvious clerks Head reached the open doorway in time to face the pompous, elderly man of law

"Ah! Good-morning, inspector," Barton said frostily "May I ask what has happened to bring *you* here?" The accent on the pronoun was definitely satiric "A broken window, I see Burglary, perhaps?"

"May I ask what brings you here?" Head retorted

"I'm afraid not" Barton smiled "My business is with Mr Garnham Excuse me, please"

He reached past Head for the bell-pull

"Don't ring," Head said "Garnham is lying dead inside there"

"He's *what*?" And Barton's hand dropped "Nonsense, man"

"Why is it nonsense?" Head inquired curiously

"Well—I mean—are you sure? He rang me at my home last night and asked me to be here at eleven this morning, with a—well, to be here at eleven And it is eleven, now"

The booming gong of a clock inside the entrance hall confirmed his assertion "But——" he added, as he took out his watch and looked at it—"he's not dead, surely? Can't be"

Head held up the pistol "By this," he said "But you, Mr Barton, would only fetch two clerks out here for one purpose that I can think of Because of this—" again he indicated the pistol—"I think it may be of some help in my inquiries if you tell me just *why* Mr Garnham asked you to call here—with two men capable of witnessing his signature, at eleven this morning"

And, after only a momentary hesitation, Barton told

IV

"THE wife, or the half-brother," Wadden surmised "Or the confidential manservant—or even old Joe Plant," Head added for him "And until we can find out how the one who pulled that trigger got out of this room, applying for a warrant would be merely asking for trouble Imploring, in fact Now how?"

He looked round the spacious room Garnham's body had been removed the overturned chair lay as they had first seen it, except that it bore signs of having been subjected to examination for fingerprints Wadden's gaze, too, roved round the apartment

"The window," he said, "is quite out of the question "

"And the walls," Head added

"Likewise floor and ceiling, as viewed and measured by me from below and above," Wadden completed "Maybe you'd like to verify——"

But Head moved over to the entrance "Remains a door, a very beautifully carved door, that once hung in a villa belonging to Alexander Borgia, I understand And Alexander was a man of ideas "

"Wasn't he the pope of that family?" Wadden asked

"He was a rip," Head answered gravely "A brainy rip, too "

He swung the heavy door wide open, and began a close scrutiny of its outer side, now exposed to the light from the window in the room Within the top part of the heavy framing were two panels carved in low relief, with all the intricacy of detail of Italian renaissance work, to represent hunting scenes Beneath these were a pair of plain panels, mellowed almost to blackness by age and polishing, and each a little more than a foot square, and then the lower third of the door was occupied by one very large panel, carved as were the two at the top, and representing Cupid leading a garlanded faun toward—presumably—Psyche, a youthful and nude female figure with outstretched arms

"It's a lovely piece of work," Head observed

He passed his hand over the projecting points of the two top panels, touching one after another and then, with extended fingers, trying them in pairs, but without result Then he sat down on the floor, and taking the door by its edge, moved it back and forth to get a reflection of midday light from the window on first one and then the other of the two smooth panels

"Yes," he said at last, "it's worth a puff from Well's blower Please, chief—while I go on looking for the key "

Wadden bellowed for the sergeant, who answered from where he waited in the entrance hall, and then appeared

"Test both these smooth panels for prints" Head bade "Don't mind me—I'm looking for something else "

He went on feeling, rather than looking, over the big carved panel beneath the smooth ones Presently, with his fingers on Cupid's face, he emitted a little, inarticulate sound, but then shook his head and sat back, watching while Well's blower revealed two sets of four prints each They were almost perfect impressions of the top phalanges of the fingers of a pair of hands, and had been made by placing the fingers on the panel with the tips pointing upward

"Photograph 'em, Wells," Head bade unemotionally

"But what a blasted fool, to leave a set like that!" Wadden exclaimed, and blew with disgust at such folly

"An open and shut case of suicide, chief, remember," Head reminded him "And I'd say there was probably no chance to wipe these off—the sound of the shot might have disturbed some one, or the one who fired it might have been scared of being seen—outside the door, remember But I want that key—I can't do a thing till I get it"

"What key?" Wadden asked

But Head did not reply He sat on the carpet, gazing pensively at the beautiful carving of the lower panel while Wells, kneeling, focused the camera and took shots of the fingerprints

"Cupid is traditionally blind," he remarked eventually

"Which is why the lady ain't worried about her wardrobe, probably," Wadden suggested "It's a bit—well, frank, as a work of art"

"I wonder—let's try blinding her too," Head said

Swinging the door back to its limit to permit of pressure on its surface, he placed the thumb and middle finger of his right hand on the Cupid's eyes, and a finger and thumb of the left hand over those of Psyche At this sudden pressure on all four points, the panel that Wells had photographed slid smoothly downward, leaving an oblong hole in the door under the lock Head reached through and turned the big, highly ornamented key, which was still in the lock from the inside of the door, once or twice

"Well, I'm damned!" said Superintendent Wadden

Head stood up "We won't try to close the panel again now," he observed "I rather think you have to lift it most of the way and then slide it by pressing your finger-tips against it"

"What made you think of it?" Wadden asked

"Well, we'd eliminated everything but the door, and the dead man didn't lock it, since he didn't shoot himself Take this door off its hinges, Wells—you and Jeffries It will be exhibit number three, I think, if we make the revolver number one"

"Then what's number two, you secretive devil?" Wadden demanded

"A lady's handkerchief, retrieved from a bag of soiled linen by Wells while I was questioning its owner," Head answered imperturbably "She used it to wipe all the fingerprints off the revolver before putting it down, and either didn't notice or didn't care about the ring of black fouling from the pistol muzzle that came off on to the handkerchief—stuff easily identifiable as a nitro powder residue"

"But—you've got to show a motive, man," Wadden protested

"Of course, you didn't hear what Barton had to tell me," Head recollected aloud "Garnham rang him last night and told him to get here at eleven this morning to consult about an action for

divorce, naming this man Keller as co-respondent in the case. Also, and much worse, Barton was to draw up a new will, in which the lady was not mentioned. Knowing the secret of the door, she made her gamble—and if she'd held that pistol a foot closer to her husband's head, she might have won."

"But—Keller—" Wadden began, half protestingly.

"It's her handkerchief, and they are her fingerprints on that panel—eh, Wells?" He turned to the sergeant.

"As nearly as I could see, they correspond to the ones I found on Mrs. Garnham's hair brush and Thand mirror handles," Wells answered.

"Therefore—" Head pressed a bell push—"I think we might have the lady in and—Oh,—Gladys, I think your name is—tell Mrs. Garnham I should be glad if she'd see me in here, please."

He waited with his back to the door, covering from sight the hole from which the secret panel had slid away.

F T Carrington

THE MILLIONTH CHANCE

By

J S CLOUSTON

"SURPRISES?" said Carrington "By Jingo, I should think I do get some! Fellows like Sherlock Holmes may always have known what was going to happen, but certainly I don't I remember one case——" He paused, and a reminiscent smile stole over his face as he lit a fresh cigarette

"Anything you can tell?" asked one of us

"Ye-es," he drawled "I don't really see why I shouldn't, provided I don't give you the right names"

We settled ourselves down in our chairs, and he began

"It was quite early on in the war, when the scare about spies and aliens in our midst and so on was at its height I had just started my secret service work and was busy over some case or other up at the head office when Livermere walked into the room

"I wish you'd come along and help me to interview a lady," he said

"What's it about?" I asked

"Her name is Mrs Schultze," said he "You remember the case of Herman Schultze, the fellow we were going to intern, only he gave us the slip? Well, this is his wife"

"German too?"

"English as they make 'em Above suspicion one would say, if she hadn't been married to this fellow But as it is, one never knows They've got a country place in Norfolk, a little too near the coast to let us run any risks Now she has discovered she is being watched—some one hasn't been exactly tactful I fancy—and she has come up full of righteous indignation If we suspect her of anything, then let us out with it and give her a fair trial, if we don't, then why watch her house? That's the line she's taking"

"And what do you want me to do?"

"Hear her talk, ask her a few questions, and see what you think of her You call yourself a judge of character, don't you?"

"It was a risky remark if I did make it!" I replied "That's to say, if you mean to put any money on my tips They don't always come off However, let me see the lady and I'll give you my impressions for what they are worth"

He took me into his room, and I must frankly confess that

for a moment my breath was fairly taken away Livermere had left me deliberately unprepared for what was coming, and I'd naturally enough fancied I should see an average British matron Instead, I saw one of the most bewitching creatures I have ever come across in a considerable experience Slender, dark, piquante, breeding to the tips of her fingers, gowns made in Paris, voice that would have stirred a door-mat—that was the lady I found in Livermere's room He introduced us, and I bowed as gracefully as nature has permitted me, and smiled within the same limitations She seemed a trifle surprised at seeing such a peaceful and amiable apparition Then she drew herself up and became the traduced patriot again—and a more charming and animated patriot I never want to meet In fact, I was quite near enough being bowled over by this one

“I have been telling Captain Livermere,” she said, ‘and her voice had a curious subtle thrill in it, ‘that I am either a traitor to my country or I am not If you think I am, then place your spies openly in my house—read my letters—question my servants frankly—arrest me if anything is suspicious, and try me! If you don't think I am, then leave me alone to do the work I'm trying to do for my country!’

“‘What work is that?’ I ventured to ask, very politely indeed, I assure you

“‘I have offered my house as a hospital If the Government will take it, I am willing to scrub my own floors so long as I may work in it! Just now I am helping in another hospital’

“‘Nursing?’

“‘I wish I could! At present I am driving my car for them It's a hospital for wounded officers’

“Livermere shot a quick glance at me Of course I knew what was in his mind A beautiful woman like that could extract a good deal of information from wounded officers in the course of a drive. However, we neither of us dropped the least hint of what we were thinking

“‘And what do you complain of, Mrs Schultze?’ I inquired

“‘I complain of my house being watched surreptitiously, servants being questioned, and letters being tampered with!’

“‘But isn't that what you have just been inviting us to do?’ said Livermere

“‘I ask you to do it openly and thoroughly—so that you can really see whether I am capable of being what you suspect! You are finding out nothing like this—because there is nothing to find out! And yet you keep on suspecting’

“Livermere is a first-class fellow, but I could see he was only irritating the lady to no purpose, so I tipped him a wink and he left us alone together I don't mind confessing that I didn't

hurry the interview, and by the end of it I was quite smitten—as I often am, though luckily always temporarily so far. As for the lady, I really think she thought me rather a nice sort of fellow. In fact, since I wanted to produce a good impression both for business reasons and because I couldn't help it, and since one gets a little practice in my job in producing the kind of impression one wants, I may even say that she very possibly thought I was a bit carried away by her charms.

"After we had parted on very amicable terms I had a little talk with Livermere.

"Well, what do you think of her?" said he.

"Either she's no traitress or else a spy in a million."

"So that it's a million to one on her being straight?"

"When it was put to me like that I hesitated for a moment, and then took the plunge.

"Yes," I said, "I think I'd be willing to let it go at that."

"And otherwise very charming?" he smiled.

"Quite delightful. A woman with a temperament, mind you, capable of a devilish lot if the temperament ran away with her. One could tell that by something in the quality of her voice alone. What's Schultze like, by the way?"

"Stout prosperous party of the commercial type; quite a bit older than she is. He's rolling in money and she hadn't a sou. Hence the marriage, I believe."

"Doesn't sound likely to have roused the temperament to the pitch of betraying her country," I said, "I think you can risk it, Livermere."

"Well, three or four weeks passed and I heard nothing more of the matter. And then one day Livermere called me into his room. I could see that something was worrying him pretty seriously.

"You remember the fair Mrs. Schultze?" he began.

"I remember the dark Mrs. Schultze," I said.

"You were right," said he, though hardly in the tone in which one usually makes that remark.

"About her being straight?"

"No, about taking your tips."

"I looked as calmly superior as possible, and merely asked—

"In what way can I assist you this time, Livermere?"

"We'll come to that in a moment," said he. "In the first place here are the facts. I acted on your judgment and stopped doing anything that could annoy her. Of course we kept a general eye on the place, but there was no more regular watching. In a little while rumours began to go about. They came from one of her servants first of all in the form of a ghost story."

"A ghost story!" I exclaimed.

“‘First of all—Odd sounds in her house and so on. Then a glimpse of a figure was seen in a passage where nobody had any business to be, seen by a fairly reliable witness too. And then came an even more specific tale of mysterious sounds and movements. Finally, I have got hold of a very full and particular description of the house, with a number of plans, from an architect who was employed by Schultze a few years ago to make some alterations, and I find it’s an old rambling Tudor place, with secret stairs and passages and priests’ hiding-holes, and the Lord knows what all’

“‘And you want me——?’ I began

“‘To take the thing up,’ said he in his crisp way

“‘There seemed to be but four explanations—spooks, rats, men, or lies. Not being a spookiest myself, I eliminated that alternative. A very little careful inquiry showed that though there might be exaggeration, the stories were founded on fact of some sort. Sifting the evidence as thoroughly as it could be sifted, rats wouldn’t account for everything. Therefore men alone remained. I studied the plans of the house to see how the secret stairs, etcetera, ran, and I found they were not in the servants’ quarters. Their part of the house in fact was comparatively modern. I also inquired into the servants’ characters, and found they were under a regular dragon of a housekeeper—a model of all the virtues, especially the more aggressive ones. The very idea of anything improper going on under this elderly virgin’s eye made the villagers smile.

“‘She has made a fool of me!’ I said to myself, and yet I was loth to believe it. In fact, I still declined to believe it until I could find evidence of one thing.

“‘And here came the most mysterious part of the business. If this lady were harbouring spies, they would have to get in and out, or what good would they be doing? And the one bit of evidence lacking was evidence of any suspicious character entering that house, leaving it, lingering in its neighbourhood, or in fact of being within fifty miles of it. I was having the place watched day and night. My watchers included two or three fellows in corduroys cleaning ditches and clipping hedges, an elderly-looking botanical enthusiast, in short, a really excellent mixed bag of disguises, and first-rate men at their job too, for I tell you I was now on my mettle. Best of all, they included the austere housekeeper, who turned out to have lost two nephews at Mons, and to be as down on Huns as on lapses from virtue. She had a natural suspicion of beautiful women, and had been quietly keeping her eye on her mistress all along.

“‘And yet something was still going on in that house beyond the shadow of a doubt.

“‘And then a certain bit of information came to my ears. I made

inquiries in quite another direction—in the neighbourhood of the port of Hull this time, and, by Jingo, I sat up! Next morning I was back in town talking it over with Livermere

“‘Are you sure that Herman Schultze ever got out of this country?’ I asked him

“‘He was supposed to have,’ said he

“‘A man devilish like him was seen at Hull trying to ship himself to Holland,’ I told him ‘He was headed off, and after that all traces of him were lost’

Livermere whistled

“‘Then the milk has practically never been out of the coco nut,’ said he ‘And the one in a million chance has come off, Carrington’

“‘I said it was a million to one against her being a *spy*,’ I corrected ‘This is rather different What would any devoted wife do?’

“He looked pretty thoughtful for a minute or two, and then he said—

“‘The point now is What are we going to do? Searching the house would be a mere farce if we didn’t search every corner of every one of those dashed hiding-holes’

“‘Whatever we search, if we find nothing it will be a good deal worse than a farce,’ I argued ‘We’ll have given the whole show away, made fools of ourselves, and possibly raised Cain For there are limits to the patience of the public if they hear of houses being watched for weeks, and then ransacked, with not a scrap of justification to show for it We’ll weaken our hands against the next time’

“‘Do you know the run of these passages and things well enough to make sure of covering them all?’

“I shook my head very decidedly

“‘I’ve gone into that, and I know a bit about them, but even that architect has only a sketchy idea of them He says they are the most extraordinary rabbit-warren of that sort to be found in any house in England’

“‘Then how are we to get at the fellow? We can’t leave a Hun hiding in his own house within a couple of miles of the North Sea coast’

“I had been wrestling with the problem pretty well all night, and I put my solution to him now, not as a very pretty one, or the kind of solution that either of us liked—especially myself, who had to do the dirty work—but simply as the only feasible solution I could think of Its chief merits were that it wouldn’t give our hand away if it didn’t come off, and that nobody could be blamed but me

“Well, we made our plans, and proceeded to set our trap, and

first of all, I must ask you to believe that I never felt such a swine in my life, and never liked a job less. However, war is war.

"The next afternoon a motor rolled up to the door of the chateau Schultze, and a very smart and fashionable gentleman alighted. That was me. He was driven by a chauffeur whose face was shrouded by a cap with an immense peak. That was Livermere. The housekeeper alone was in the know, and had given us the tip as to the proper hour to call, so as to catch the lady as near napping as we could. I was shown straight into a very charming old-fashioned room used as a sort of boudoir, and as soon as I had disappeared, the chauffeur slipped into the hall and stood ready to do a sprint to my rescue if need be.

"I went slap into that room on the heels of the maid, and if ever a lady was flurried and found a guest unwelcome, it was the fascinating Mrs. Schultze. She was so flurried (though she carried it off marvellously) that she never noticed one little object lying on a small table till I had closed my hand over it and slipped it into my pocket. It was a half-smoked pipe, and by Jingo, it was *warm*! So was the scent, thought I.

"I had picked up enough of the run of the secret passages to feel perfectly certain that one of them opened into this room somehow and somewhere. Looking round it, I at once suspected either a certain old portrait or a section of the bookcase as being the door. Within a couple of minutes I had plumped for the bookcase. I had heard a sound, very faint and gentle, but still an unmistakable sound. And I could see that the lady had heard it too, and was trying to cover it up.

"There was no doubt I was in luck's way, and all seemed to depend on my having enough assurance and brutality to carry the thing through. Lord, how I would have liked to kick myself! However, instead, I went straight at it. I had taken a small nip of raw whisky just before I got out of the car, so as to give my breath a good alcoholic reek, and if I describe my manner as sprightly, I don't exaggerate in the least.

"*'My dear Mrs. Schultze!'* I said, as I squeezed her hand, and breathed at her for all I was worth, 'I say, I hope you're all alone, and all the rest of it, eh? What? I simply couldn't resist the temptation of looking you up—literally couldn't keep away from you. I say, you know you're even more beautiful than you were last time. You remember last time, eh? What?'

"She was deadly pale, poor creature, but her voice was very quiet, and her dignity perfect. If war hadn't been war, I'd have chucked it, and bolted. However, war being war, I didn't.

"*'I remember you, Mr. Carrington,'* she said, 'and you were very kind and polite to me—last time.'

"It was a fair hit on the point, but I was prepared for it, and merely beamed the more affectionately

"I say, sit down and tell me what you've been doing?" I said, and put out my hand to catch her arm

"She whisked herself away, but still kept her composure

"Will you come into the drawing-room?" she said, and tried to head for the door

"I was expecting that move, and got in front of her

"We're jolly quiet here—nobody to disturb us!" said I, and, of course, I was pitching my voice pretty high. On top of that she gave a smothered cry when she saw my arms opening amorously, and knocked over the small table in getting clear

"If that husband was anything but a Hun, this would have brought him out already!" I said to myself, and the next instant I did hear a most distinct sound from the neighbourhood of the bookcase. But he still stayed in his burrow, and there was nothing for it but piling on more insults

"I'm in love with you!" I cried, right loud out too

"You are drunk!" she said, stinging and low

"I pretended to get annoyed at this

"Drunk!" said I. "By George, I'll make you pay something for saying that! A kiss! Damn it, I'm going to have a kiss!"

"She made a dive at the bell, but I was ahead of her again, and did catch her by the arm this time. Mind you, I was acting the part of half-sprung ravisher for all I was worth, and though her nerve was good, it gave when I had actually caught hold of her. She gave one piercing cry, and that did the trick. The old bookcase flew open in the middle, and out leapt a most furiously indignant gentleman in khaki!"

"In khaki!" we cried. "Do you mean that Schultze was disguised as—"

"Unfortunately it wasn't the lady's husband at all, said Carrington

"Yes," he added a few minutes later, when we had recovered from the shock of this *dénoûment*, "as I said to Livermore driving home, 'If you really want to make sure of winning your money, Livermore, back a wounded officer against an absent Hun as often as you get the chance'"

LION FACE

By

F A. M WEBSTER

THE trial, upon the capital charge, of Nina Holybone, who would never have been brought to justice but for the acute reasoning of Ebenezer Entwistle, drew much public attention to the obscure Pimlico chemist, after his evidence and the part he had played in the strange case of Dr Stallard were published in the daily Press

From that time onwards all sorts of queer people began to visit the quaint corner shop in Tolnody Street, and, since I was still at a loose end after leaving the Service, I changed my quarters from chambers in the Inns of Court to a flat in Victoria Street. This enabled me to keep constantly in touch with Old Ebbie.

Had he seen fit to abandon the chemist's shop in favour of a private inquiry agent's office he would, I am convinced, have made a handsome income, but his early training as a medical student had given him a great fondness for dabbling in drugs and medicines. Further, he had, as he said, a vocation for healing, and looked upon the poor of the neighbourhood much as a doctor regards his patients, or a parson his parishioners. But he was more than healer, for he acted also as father confessor to many.

The man, as I got to know him in those days, was a mass of contradictory surprises, for, although he was as tender as a mother with those to whose bodily ailments he attended, he yet possessed one of the most coldly logical brains with which any man was ever gifted. His successes in the realms of criminal research were remarkable, as his friend, Detective Inspector Wilson, of the Criminal Investigation Department, was always ready to acknowledge, but he had his failures also.

Several times the police had solicited his unofficial aid, but generally speaking, his cases came to him through private sources, nor were they all connected with actual crime.

One evening, the old-fashioned bell behind the shop door jangled harshly. Old Ebbie laid down his reeking pipe reluctantly as he rose.

For a few moments I listened idly to the low murmur of conversation, which came from the shop beyond the half-open door. Then Entwistle's voice was raised.

"If you do not mind the smell of tobacco I'd be glad to discuss this matter with you in my sitting-room," he said.

A moment later the door was pushed open to admit a tall, well-dressed woman of some thirty years of age, who came to a sudden halt as she caught sight of me sitting by the fire. I rose at once and at the same instant Old Ebbie put her at her ease.

"Go in, madam," he said, "this is Captain Hicks, who often gives me his help in the investigations I conduct."

The lady came forward nervously and took the chair I drew up to the fire.

"I am at my wits' end, Mr Entwistle. Sir Robert Rothwell, an old friend of yours, advised me to ask your advice," she murmured.

"In what way can I help you?"

"God knows that I want help," she said, "and yet it seems a terrible thing to discuss one's husband with strangers."

"Many strange matters have been mentioned in this room," said Entwistle, "you may count upon our discretion."

For a moment longer the lady hesitated, then, with a gesture of finality, which showed clearly that she had determined upon an irrevocable step, she spoke.

"Six years ago," she said, "when I was in Egypt I met Mr Lowring Holmes, who was returning to England on leave from British East Africa, where he held an appointment as Political Officer. It was a real case of love at first sight with us. We were married in Cairo within a month of our first meeting, and spent our honeymoon in England, travelling from place to place, since my husband has no relatives other than one brother, who is a medical missionary somewhere in Central Africa, but him I have never seen."

"Everywhere we went we took with us my husband's Nandi servant, Karamanga. He has been with him for years and appears to regard John, my husband, rather as a god than as a human being."

"All arrangements had been made for me to return to East Africa with my husband, at the termination of his leave, but war was declared. My husband, an old regular officer, at once rejoined his regiment, and proceeded to France. He was badly wounded in 1914, and, upon being found unfit for further active service as a soldier, was reclaimed by the Colonial Office. He was ordered to resume his duties in East Africa, but he would not allow me to accompany him, on account of the submarine peril, which was very real at that period."

"Upon the signing of the Armistice, John was unable to get home, but two months ago he arrived and I commented upon the fact that he had not brought Karamanga with him. I remember

LION FACE

By

F A M WEBSTER

THE trial, upon the capital charge, of Nina Holybone, who would never have been brought to justice but for the acute reasoning of Ebenezer Entwistle, drew much public attention to the obscure Pimlico chemist, after his evidence and the part he had played in the strange case of Dr Stallard were published in the daily Press

From that time onwards all sorts of queer people began to visit the quaint corner shop in Tolnody Street, and, since I was still at a loose end after leaving the Service, I changed my quarters from chambers in the Inns of Court to a flat in Victoria Street. This enabled me to keep constantly in touch with Old Ebbie

Had he seen fit to abandon the chemist's shop in favour of a private inquiry agent's office he would, I am convinced, have made a handsome income, but his early training as a medical student had given him a great fondness for dabbling in drugs and medicines. Further, he had, as he said, a vocation for healing, and looked upon the poor of the neighbourhood much as a doctor regards his patients, or a parson his parishioners. But he was more than healer, for he acted also as father confessor to many

The man, as I got to know him in those days, was a mass of contradictory surprises, for, although he was as tender as a mother with those to whose bodily ailments he attended, he yet possessed one of the most coldly logical brains with which any man was ever gifted. His successes in the realms of criminal research were remarkable, as his friend Detective Inspector Wilson, of the Criminal Investigation Department, was always ready to acknowledge, but he had his failures also

Several times the police had solicited his unofficial aid, but generally speaking, his cases came to him through private sources, nor were they all connected with actual crime

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"Upon the signing of the Armistice, John was unable to get home, but two months ago he arrived and I commented upon the fact that he had not brought Karamanga with him I remember

distinctly that he made an evasive answer which, at that time, greatly surprised me”

For a long moment Mrs Lowring Holmes hesitated, as if at a loss how best to continue her story

“When you have heard my story you will probably say that, being a woman, I am unduly jealous of my husband’s native servant, Karamanga, but I am not I know how much the Nandi has done for John, whose life he has saved more than once It is not that, but I have an absolute horror of anything which is not absolutely straight and above board

“A few days ago I walked into my husband’s study, and, noticing a bearer cheque for a hundred pounds upon his desk, I commented upon the amount To my complete surprise he showed marked confusion and was brusque, to the verge of rudeness

“We have accounts at the same bank and, later in the day, I had occasion to cash a cheque of my own But you may imagine my astonishment when I saw Karamanga at the counter cashing my husband’s cheque for a hundred pounds! I should have spoken to him, but the moment he recognised me the native servant turned and walked quickly out of the bank I followed him to the street, but he had already disappeared”

“Did you mention this matter to your husband upon your return home?” asked Entwistle

“No,” replied Mrs Holmes

“And why not?”

“Because there has always been perfect faith between us, and I was not prepared to call that faith in question

“I will admit that I wondered why my husband did not wish me to know of the presence in England of his Nandi servant From that point I began to speculate as to the sort of life John led in the African wilds One hears so frequently that East and West of Suez the standards of morals are entirely different Frankly, I was bothered, but, at that time, I had absolutely no grounds for suspicion

“Later, however, it was different We live on Richmond Hill, and several times recently, when I have asked my husband to take me out, he has pleaded previous engagements Once he had an appointment with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, another time it was the Crown Agents whom he had to see concerning his pay, upon some evenings he has pleaded that he must attend sessions of the Royal Geographical Society, of which he is a Fellow

“I neither minded nor gave the matter a thought, until one afternoon I met him face to face in the Friar’s Stile Road at Richmond when he was supposed to be in Downing Street He gave me a long rambling account of how a bout of malaria had

suddenly fallen upon him. We walked home together and I insisted upon taking his temperature, which was quite normal.

"Things went on this way for some weeks, but Friar's Stile Road began to possess a fascination for me. I walked up and down that road so often that I knew every feature of it. There is a house there which has long been unoccupied because it is believed to be haunted. This house I saw was now tenanted. I mentioned the matter to my husband, who laughingly remarked that most people would probably be willing to keep house with Satan himself, so long as the present shortage of accommodation continued.

"Every time I strolled through Friar's Stile Road, I looked at that house. It has exercised a fearful fascination for me, ever since I saw a most terrible face at the window."

"What kind of face?" asked Entwistle eagerly.

"I hardly know how to describe it," said Mrs. Holmes, "it was so essentially bestial, more like the face of a wild beast than that of a man."

"Yes, go on," said Old Ebbie.

"When I saw that face," continued Mrs. Holmes, "I began to believe in the ghost stories associated with the house, and to pity the inhabitants, so far my interest was quite impersonal. I ceased frequenting Friar's Stile Road for a while, and yet the call of that street was stronger than I could resist.

"Then all at once my interest became entirely personal.

"One afternoon, when I was passing along the road alone, my husband having business to attend to in London, I saw again that inhuman face at the window. It was there for one instant, then some one came and dragged the man back from the public gaze. A moment later I saw Karamanga peering round the curtains.

"I was both frightened and intrigued, but still I did not mention the matter to John, for fear that he should think I had been prying into his private affairs.

"Some time elapsed, and then my husband told me that he must go North for a week-end upon urgent private business. I saw him off at King's Cross by an early morning train, you may imagine, therefore, my amazement when I met him in Friar's Stile Road that same afternoon. This meeting took place practically upon the threshold of the house where Karamanga lived, and where the man with the face of a beast looked out of the upstairs window. Again he offered the excuse that an attack of malaria had overtaken him and forced him to return home.

"A week later I entered that ill-omened road when John was half-way along the street. I saw him knock upon the door of the house, where the beast-faced man is, and I saw Karamanga admit him. I thought then that the time for diffidence was passed, and walked straight up to the house and rang the bell. Karamanga

answered my summons. He admitted his identity at once, but denied that he had seen his master either that day or, for that matter, since he returned to England. I attempted to force my way into the house, but he shut the door in my face and refused to open it again, although I must have nearly broken the bell with ringing and deafened every one within earshot by my repeated knockings. In a short time people began to look out of their windows and then I went away, fearing to make a spectacle of myself.

"That evening, when my husband returned home I taxed him with visiting the house. To my amazement he denied all knowledge of the place, saying that I had become imaginative of late and must have mistaken the back of some other man.

"Then I asked him as to the presence of Karamanga in Friar's Stile Road. He told me that he had certainly brought the Nandi to England with him, but, finding that he was jealous of me, had paid him a consideration and bidden him find other service, until such time as we should all go out to British East Africa, or Kenya Colony, as it is now called.

"My husband spoke so earnestly and convincingly that I was forced, against my better judgment, to believe him. Next morning, however, I awakened seeming to hear the sound of a low whistle from beneath our window, which looks out over the garden towards the river. I roused my husband and asked him if he had heard anything, but he had not and so I went to sleep again. That morning I awoke unusually early to find myself alone in the bed, but before many minutes had passed John walked in, excusing himself on the grounds that repeated attacks of malaria had destroyed his nerves and that he felt compelled to get up and walk lest he should be suffocated.

"I think he saw that I did not believe him, for he redoubled his attentions during the next few days and seemed to throw off the dourness which of late has possessed him.

"His present attitude towards me mattered nothing, however, for I knew that my husband had told me a deliberate lie, and that hurt me more than any blow could possibly have done.

"Upon his return to the bedroom he was evidently surprised to find me already awake. He showed this by a guilty start, nor was his voice in any way normal. I said nothing, but at the same time my very soul was sick at the knowledge that my husband was hiding something from me. I longed to know where he had been in answer to that low, insistent whistle, which had sounded from beneath our window, and I burned with fury at the thought that those hours of darkness might easily have been spent in the arms of another woman, some dusky beauty from the East, perhaps some slave of his whom he holds concealed in the house in Friar's Stile Road, some heathen woman as jealously guarded as a god by the

Nandi, Karamanga, and the beast-faced man whom I had seen staring down from an upstairs window

"Through the days that followed, my husband was seldom from my side, but, although no word was spoken, I was aware that a wall of partition was growing up between us, and all the while he kept looking at me in a speculative sort of way, as if asking himself how far he dare trust me, or how fully he may rely upon my forgiveness, and I gave him no encouragement to speak, God pardon me, for I was hurt to the very quick

"Yesterday afternoon I met John face to face as he emerged from the house in Friar's Stile Road

"To say that I was astounded is beside the point, for, whatever intrigue he had been carrying on, I fully expected that he would abandon it after finding me wakeful upon his previous return

"I was then determined that the affair must be settled once and for all, no matter what the outcome might be

"John stood still, as if paralysis had seized him suddenly at the sight of me. Deadly fear, painful humility, love, and something very like shame seemed to flash across his expressive features. When I took a step towards him he held out his hands as if to ward off the approach of something unutterably evil. That action taught me that we had, indeed, reached the crisis of our married career. I think that at that moment death would have been very welcome, for my mental agony was well nigh insupportable. I am of a very loving nature, Mr Entwistle, and that look of fear and loathing with which my husband watched my approach seemed to dry up the well-springs of life within me"

For a moment the poor woman stopped speaking, while she hid her face in her hands, and her shoulders shook with the strength of her silent sobs

At length Old Ebbie leaned forward and laid a soothing hand upon her arm

"Courage, Mrs Holmes," said he, "try to finish your story. When we have all the facts you may be quite sure that we will do everything within our power to help you"

"Well, Mr Entwistle," she continued, "I have said that I am a loving woman by nature, but I am also very strong-willed and, indeed, but seldom turned from a course upon which I have determined

"John," I said, "I insist upon going with you into that house at which Karamanga lives. I am your wife, from whom you have no right to conceal that part of your life which is changing you so completely"

"Let me beseech you, by every bond of affection that exists between us, Kathleen," he answered, "to trust me in this matter"

"No," I said, "you have forfeited all title to my trust, how far

also you have forfeited your claims upon my affection it remains for me to ascertain ”

“ ‘My dear,’ he said, as he attempted to take my arm, ‘if you will not forego your purpose for my sake and for your own, will you do so for the sake of the child?’ ”

“One moment,” interrupted Old Ebbie, “I do not think you have mentioned your child before?”

“We have no child,” answered Mrs Holmes, in some confusion, ‘but one is expected’ ”

“I beg your pardon,” said Entwistle “Please continue your story ”

“Seeing that he could not turn me from my purpose,’ Mrs Holmes went on, “my husband stepped past me and walked quickly down the road

“Since then I have not seen him ”

“I see,” said Old Ebbie, after sitting silent for several moments “Did your husband leave no message upon his departure?”

“No message at all, but he has, in a way, communicated with me since ”

“Please explain the nature of the communication, and just exactly how it came to you Try not to omit the most trivial detail ”

“While I was at breakfast this morning, the telephone bell rang,” said Mrs Holmes, “and the housemaid hurried into the dining-room to say that I was wanted I went to the telephone at once, and a voice, which sounded faint and very far away, said, ‘Is that you, Kathleen?’ And, upon my giving an affirmative answer, continued ‘This is John speaking I’m all right, but may have to be away some little time You are not to worry about me, I will explain everything to you in due course, but, meanwhile, I want to tell you——’ ”

“A horrible gurgling noise followed, an intermittent buzzing and then—silence From that gurgling noise, I gathered the impression that some one had choked the speaker into silence ”

“Yes, that sounds a reasonable hypothesis,” said Ebbie, “but it is by no means certain We are not sure even that it was your husband who spoke What steps did you take after that?”

“I rang through to the Exchange, but the Supervisor either could not or would not tell me anything Then I went to the house in Friar’s Stile Road, where I plied the knocker and bell for twenty minutes, without getting an answer At last a milkman, who was passing, told me that he thought the people had left, or gone for a holiday, as he had seen a cab laden with luggage drive away from the door last evening I asked him if he had supplied the family with milk and, when he answered in the negative, I asked him why he had happened to notice the cab so particularly He replied that he had stopped a moment to look at the black man who was

helping to bring out the luggage and whose strength had seemed to him phenomenal ”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Ebbie, “you have certainly left no stone unturned that will help us to find your husband What did you do next?”

“For a moment I thought of going to the police, but then I reflected that such a move on my part might result in an exposure the nature of which would ruin my husband’s professional career ”

“You were wise to refrain from calling in the police, I fancy,” said Ebbie thoughtfully, “but I should not brood too deeply upon the possibility of your husband having brought a native woman to England That strikes me as being highly improbable ”

“Please God you are right,” she replied “I felt that I was not, as yet, justified in enlisting the aid of the police and so I determined to consult my godfather He, as I have said already, sent me to you ”

It was at that stage that I had the satisfaction of surprising Old Ebbie and of restoring some small measure of confidence to a sorely troubled lady

“Mrs Holmes,” I said, “it has never been my privilege to meet your husband, but the East African Protectorate, which has recently become a colony, although vast in extent, is a small place in the sense that every white person knows pretty well all there is to know about every other white person I know your husband by repute and I can assure you that, so far as it is humanly possible for any man to judge by the record of another the standards of his private life, your suspicions must be absolutely groundless ”

She thanked me charmingly, then looked interrogatively towards Old Ebbie

“There is nothing very much more that you can tell me, I fancy,” he said, “except as regards the attitude of the native servant, Karamanga, towards yourself, when he was in England before?”

“When first I met my husband in Egypt,” she answered, “the attitude of the Nandi used to puzzle me considerably Whenever we returned from a ride, or any other expedition, upon which he did not accompany us, he used to look at me in a most curious manner, suggesting a combination of fear and hate, in which was blended the possibility of love, if you can understand what I mean

“After our engagement became an accomplished fact, I spoke to John concerning Karamanga’s attitude, for now the hate had given place to obvious affection and the desire to please, but still some shade of fear seemed to remain

“John said that Karamanga had become aware of his master’s growing affection for me almost before John himself had realised

his own feelings, and had feared lest the new love he foresaw might bring unhappiness to the master whom he worships. During the period of uncertainty he remained ready to love or hate me, according to my treatment of his master, when John's happiness became assured, Karamanga's outlook was stabilised also, but as he said once, 'He still feared, because the happiness born of woman is as uncertain as the harmlessness of a tame leopard.' But I must say that I was surprised when John told me that he had not brought Karamanga to the house on their return to England, because he was afraid of the man's jealousy of me."

"Thank you," said Old Ebbie, "we will do what we can here in London this evening, and to-morrow morning we will run down to Richmond and take a look at the house in the Friar's Stile Road."

The old chemist turned to me with a smile when our visitor had taken her departure in the taxi, that for the past hour had been ticking off twopences in Tolnody Street.

"A very pretty little problem," he said, as he stroked his grizzled moustache. "What do you make of it?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid," I answered.

"Dear, dear," said he, "that's strange. The things you have told me about the East African natives prove clearly that you are observant and have studied such people. Tell me, do you, on the whole, consider the Nandis an affectionate but jealous race?"

"It is very hard to win the affection of a Nandi," I answered, "but once you have done so there is no more loyal or devoted man in all the world, the affection given to one particular person is, moreover, usually extended, in a lesser degree, to all those to whom that person is attached."

"Then, generally speaking, they are not of a jealous nature?"

"No."

"But are liable to individual variations, like all the rest of the human race, so that this Karamanga might well exhibit the degree of jealousy which appears to be indicated?"

"I cannot answer that question until I know exactly what you are driving at," I replied.

"Cast your mind back over the features of the case," said Entwistle. "You, yourself, have testified as to the high standing of this Mr Lowring Holmes——"

"Major Holmes," I interrupted.

"But his wife spoke of him as Mr Holmes?"

"At the time of their first meeting, yes."

"Well, never mind, we know that he is a good soldier and a first-class official, of whom the natives are fond. I judge that his servant, Karamanga, worships him as almost more than man, but might not that love turn to hate upon his master bringing him to England and then turning him off to seek fresh service until he

was ready to return to Africa? You may say that such an action does not tally with the Major's reputation, as it is known to you. But it is an act in which he would be perfectly justified, if he feared for the safety of his wife—you must remember also that he gave the man a very handsome present, since one feels that the bearer cheque for a hundred pounds must be regarded in that light."

"So far it sounds plausible enough," I said, as my companion paused to fill his pipe. "But I fancy that there are a lot of earths to be stopped if that fox is to give you a hunt."

"Maybe," said Old Ebbie, "but I imagine that Major Holmes, finding that the native had taken service so close to him—as the man would do naturally—became alarmed, perhaps for his wife's safety, perhaps no more than annoyed because he had omitted to tell her that he had brought Karamanga home and did not regard with equanimity the prospect of being detected in even so small a deception."

"Then how do you account for the beast-faced man, and the subsequent disappearance of all three?"

"There you have me on ground which is at present uncertain. It is possible that the bestial face seen by Mrs. Holmes was no more than a devil-mask, such as, I believe, many natives employ in their dances and which Karamanga may have seen fit to put on. As to the disappearance, is it not possible that Karamanga, a primitive savage at heart, and, as the milkman has stated, a very powerful fellow physically, may have had recourse to primitive methods by carrying his beloved master bodily away?"

"It is just possible," I answered, "but my knowledge of native psychology tells me that your reasoning is at fault somewhere."

"Ah, well!" said Ebbie, "we shall see, meanwhile I'll walk round to Scotland Yard and ask Wilson for a little unofficial aid."

Towards midnight Old Ebbie turned up at my flat in Victoria Street.

"I've been down to Carter Lane," he said, "and I have learned that the trunk call which Mrs. Holmes received this morning came through from Leeds. That would not help us much, but for the fact that Wilson has been good enough to ask the Yorkshire Constabulary to try and trace the arrival by train of a black man accompanied by one or two Europeans, and to find out their present whereabouts if possible."

"Good," I said, "what is the next move?"

"If you will be at Waterloo by nine in the morning we will go down to Richmond together," he answered.

That night was unprofitable, for the problem had so intrigued me that I could not sleep. I reached Waterloo at a few minutes before nine, as the clock commenced striking the hour I saw Old Ebbie enter the booking-hall.

He was dressed as usual in a square-tailed morning coat of sporting cut, rabbit-skin waistcoat, Gladstone collar, bird's-eye cravat, and a half-high top hat of felt

In Friar's Stile Road we met a young man just emerging from "The Laurestinus," as we discovered to be the name of the house where Karamanga had lived

"Auctioneer's clerk," whispered Ebbie to me, as he spotted the bulky notebook and the folding five-foot rod, which the youth carried. In a moment the old chemist stepped up to the somewhat surprised young man

"Good-morning," he said, "I suppose you've been sent up to make the inventory? I was just going to have a look at the place"

"I've been making a catalogue for the sale," said the clerk, "but how you got to hear of it beats me, for the Guv'nor only decided this morning to have a catalogue prepared"

"Ah!" said Ebbie, "a smart young fellow like you ought to know that we dealers have our own means of finding out when a sale is in prospect. Perhaps I might be prepared to make an offer for the lot as it stands, it would be a feather in your cap to effect a quick sale. Shall we go in and have a look round?"

"All right," answered the youth, "I'm about fed up with sales lately. It will save me a night or two working late if you do buy the lot as it stands"

The house was very poorly furnished, with the exception of a back sitting-room, in which were many African and Indian curios, and a long teakwood chair, such as is used everywhere in the tropics, on the first floor the front bedroom was furnished to a degree of luxury which assorted ill with the rest of the house. A small bedroom adjoining had evidently been occupied by Karamanga, for his *mkeka*, or sleeping mat, was still spread upon the bedstead

While we were inspecting the front bedroom Old Ebbie uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise, as he lifted from the washhand stand a bottle containing some pale brownish oil, which gave off a most offensive odour as soon as he removed the cork

"In your wanderings, have you ever come across the *Gynocardia odorata* nut?" he queried

"Yes," I answered, "I have seen it in India"

"This oil is expressed from the seeds of that nut," he said, as he replaced the bottle. "I shouldn't be surprised if we find some sodium chloride in the kitchen"

Of the two, I do not know whether the auctioneer's clerk or myself proved the more surprised at this strange pronouncement. Before going to the kitchen, where, incidentally, we found some sodium chloride, just as Ebbie had predicted, we took a look at the

bathroom, and here the old chemist seemed more interested in the bath itself than in the furniture and fittings

"I perceive," he said, "that the last occupants were fond of salt baths"

"Eh!" exclaimed the startled clerk "Look here," he added, "you seem to be a strange sort of dealer What's the game?"

"Um, I don't think I'll buy this lot, anyway," answered Ebbie, "and I should not advise your firm to be in too much of a hurry to sell it, either If they do they may get into serious trouble with the health authorities I don't think Major Holmes gave you instructions to sell, did he?"

"No, sir," answered the clerk, who was getting scared "We act for the landlord, and the Guv'nor, thinking the tenants had flitted, told me to come and catalogue the stuff, in case of accidents Please don't let on that I showed you over the house, or I shall lose my job"

"That's all right," answered Ebbie

Contrary to my expectations we did not call upon Mrs Holmes, but went straight back to Tolnody Street, my companion barely speaking a word the whole way, nor did I question him, since I saw that he was intent upon an entirely new train of thought, suggested, no doubt, by something he had seen at the house in Friar's Stile Road The only information he vouchsafed was while we sat at lunch

"My first theory was entirely wrong," he said, "but I think I am on the right track now"

The meal continued in silence, afterwards he left the medicine boy to look after the shop and relapsed into an antiquated arm-chair, his form becoming dimmer as the light faded and the cloud of tobacco smoke grew denser

Towards tea-time the shop bell jangled harshly, a moment later Tommy, the errand boy, thrust his head round the door

"Th' tec's 'ere, Mr Hentwistle," he whispered, in an awed voice, which brought a smile to my lips

"Show him in, then," said Ebbie, as he fanned away the clouds of smoke from before his face

"Yes, here I am," laughed Detective-Inspector Wilson, as he followed the boy, whose ear he tweaked playfully

"Good-evening, Inspector," said Ebbie, rising from his chair "I hope that you have good news for me"

"Yes, we've got the information for which you asked, and very pleased the Yard is to repay in like coin the many services you have rendered the CID"

"Say no more about that," said Ebbie "What is your news?"

The Inspector thumbed over the pages of his note-book before replying At last he found the entry for which he was seeking

"This came through on the telephone an hour ago," he said "The party you are asking about reached Leeds on the midnight train yesterday. The station police noticed them particularly, on account of the black man, and because they carried their own stretcher in the guard's van. There were three of them—a fine, soldierly-looking fellow, who seemed to be in charge, the black man, and another, for whom they had brought the stretcher, and who was so swathed up in wrappings that no one caught even a glimpse of his face. They drove away in a closed car, that has not yet been traced, but of which the local police expect to have information by the morning, or, at latest, by midday to-morrow."

"Ah," said Old Ebbie, "I'm much obliged to you, Inspector, would you mind passing me the Bradshaw which is upon the small table at your elbow?"

"I see," he continued, after consulting the railway guide, "that there is an excellent train at midnight, which will get us to Leeds in time to take our baths before breakfast. Do you mind a night in the train, Hicks, or are you going back to the sybaritic delights of your own flat?"

"No," I answered "I'm going to see this thing through with you. A night on soft, well-sprung carriage cushions will be no great hardship after my years of campaigning."

"All right," he said, with a chuckle, "as a concession to your desire for softness, I think that we might travel first-class. And now, Inspector, if you have not made any arrangements for this evening, perhaps you will join us in a frugal meal later on. I have a few friends, medical men mostly, coming in for a game of poker, if you can countenance that form of gambling?"

"I shall be delighted," answered Inspector Wilson; "where do we dine?"

"Will 'Overton's' at seven o'clock suit you?"

"Admirably."

"Very well then, that is arranged."

That evening I watched the old chemist with particular interest. Not for one instant did he betray the fact that he was engaged upon an important investigation, his whole attention was centred upon the cards, yet at 11.25 p.m. to the minute he broke up the party, with a big Jack-Pot unopened, at the same time apologising to his guests and explaining that we must go at once if we were to catch the midnight train at St. Pancras.

At Leeds a plain-clothes man met us.

"Inspector Wilson telephoned through from London, sir," he said, addressing Old Ebbie. "Our reports are not in yet, but I will come to you later on if you will tell me where we can find you."

"We will go into the Queen's Hotel," answered my companion,

"where we shall bath, shave, and have breakfast How soon may we expect to hear from you?"

"Within a couple of hours I should think, sir," said the man, as he beckoned to a porter to take our handbags In point of fact it was well after midday when the Chief Constable sent over a note, in which he said that he would be glad to see us at once

"We've tracked your men," he said to Ebbie, to whom he showed marked deference, evidently having learned from Scotland Yard of my friend's remarkable gifts "Yes, we've found them, but I doubt if we should have done so but for the sagacity of one of the County Police, he met a child crying upon the road, who, upon his inquiring the cause of her grief, told him that she had been frightened by the appearance at a cottage window of an inhuman, animal-like face He went to Burstwith, the village upon the outskirts of which the child had seen this terrible apparition, and found a strange car garaged at the local inn The chauffeur told him that he had brought a party out from Leeds, and has orders to stay where he is pending their pleasure "

"I see," said Ebbie, "how does one find the cottage where the child saw the apparition?"

"It is on the shoulder of the hill approaching the village I take it you will go straight over there Would you like me to arrange for the local constable to meet you?"

"That is very kind of you We should arrive there by five o'clock "

"Can I give you any further help?"

"Not at present, thank you," answered Ebbie, "this is just a small private investigation in which the police are unlikely to be interested, although it is possible that the Medical Authorities may have something to say upon the matter later on

"I think," said Ebbie, as we left the police station, "that we will now go and hire a fast motor-car "

Despite the excitement I felt at the approaching *dénouement*, as to the nature of which Old Ebbie had failed to enlighten me, the rush of cold air against my face and the steady purr of the powerful engine, had almost lulled me to sleep by the time the car drew up at the foot of a hill, that crossed a shoulder of dark, mysterious moorland A constable came forward through the gloom, and stood peering into the car

"We are the people from Leeds whom you were told to meet," said Ebbie "Is there any fresh development?"

"That's as may be, sir," answered the policeman "The driver of the car I notified to headquarters came to me half an hour since, asking me to direct him to the nearest doctor, and if there were two or three here or whereabouts to name one who had lived in any hot climate "

"By gad!" exclaimed Ebbie, "we'd better be getting forward. Jump in, constable, we'll drop you a hundred yards from the cottage."

"Then I needn't get in at all, sir," said the man with a smile, "for the cottage is scarcely more than that distance up the hill. You can't miss it, for it is the first dwelling you come to on the right."

We jumped out of the car and walked forward, leaving the constable and the chauffeur talking together.

Lights were burning in the stone-built cottage when we knocked at the door. It was opened after a momentary delay by a well-built native, showing the black, aquiline, and well-moulded features which distinguish the Nandi people.

"Good-evening," said Ebbie. "Our car has broken down, may we come in and sit down until it is repaired?"

"It is not permitted," said the Nandi, and would have shut the door if I had not slipped my foot into the jamb.

"*Nataka kuona Bwana yako, e rafiki yangu,*" (I want to see your master, he is a friend of mine), I said quickly, speaking in Swahili.

I heard the man give a gasp of surprise. While he was hesitating what to do, some one spoke from the room beyond.

"What is it, Karamanga?" he said. "Tell them there is a dead man in the house, and they cannot enter."

"It is all right, Major Holmes, I'm a friend from East Africa, and I must see you," I called.

"Oh, very well," he answered. "Show the gentlemen in, Karamanga."

The moment the permission was granted Old Ebbie stepped past me into the room, where a fine, handsome man, whose features were at present marred by sorrow, was seated at a rough deal table.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "what do you want with me? I do not know either of you."

"You may know me by name, Major Holmes," I interposed. "I am Captain Hicks, of the Loamshires, until recently seconded for duty with the King's African Rifles."

"Yes, I know your name," he answered, "but that does not explain your presence here, nor the apparently unwarrantable intrusion of your companion."

"Allow me to explain," said Old Ebbie, "and also to apologise for breaking in upon you at this sad moment, when you are no doubt mourning the loss of your only brother."

"Eh!" exclaimed Holmes, "what do you know about my brother?"

"All that there is to know, I fancy," said Old Ebbie. "After

your disappearance, Mrs Holmes was sent to consult me by her godfather, Sir Robert Rothwell "

"And she told you about poor Herbert's illness?"

"How could Mrs Holmes have told me of your brother's illness, when she neither knew of that illness, nor even that he was in England?"

"But, man, I told her, over the telephone, that my poor brother was desperately ill, that I had brought him here to Yorkshire, probably to die, and that I would explain everything that has so puzzled her upon my return "

"Um, it is a pity the telephone people cut you off before half the conversation was finished, all Mrs Holmes heard, after a few words, was a horrible gurgling, which caused her to believe that some one had strangled you into silence "

"Good God!" exclaimed the major "Having regard to her condition, I would not have had her receive such a shock for anything "

"I see that you are a strong believer in pre-natal influence, Major," said Old Ebbie "I assume that that is why you strove so hard to prevent your wife from seeing your brother, who, I am sure, was suffering from *Lepra Tuberosa*, with the contingent terrible facial deformity known as *facies leonina*, from the ferocious expression given to the face by the heavy and furrowed infiltration of the cheeks and forehead "

While Old Ebbie was speaking, the Major regarded him with ever-growing amazement

"How you have discovered all this is quite beyond me," he said, "but your deductions, or information, are absolutely correct Herbert was a medical missionary at the Leper Asylum at Kuala Lumpur in the Federated Malay States for many years before going into Central Africa, but leprosy did not manifest itself in him until after four years, which is generally held to be the longest period of incubation

"Word of his affliction—but not from his lips—reached me in Nairobi, and, with Karamanga, I went up country to get him He did not want to come, but finally gave way when I told him that recently a case of leprosy had been treated successfully in England, by a doctor using Chaulmoogra oil "

"Which is expressed from the seeds of the *Gynocardia odorata* bean," murmured Ebbie, turning to me

"We got home to England all right," continued the Major, ignoring the interruption, "but my poor brother, who was terribly sensitive about his appearance, for already his features were assuming a lion-like look, begged me to hide him somewhere until such time as we could get hold of the doctor who formerly had treated

a similar case of leprosy successfully, but who, we found, was abroad at the moment

"I was at my wits' end, until Karamanga suggested hiding my brother in a house close to his own. I gave my servant £100 for furniture, and adopted his suggestion, and, having secured some Chaumoogra oil, with which Herbert was rubbed daily, salt for his baths, and sodium chloride to mix with his food, as I was told was the correct treatment, we set ourselves to await as patiently as possible the return of the specialist

"It was my intention to tell my wife, in due course, of Herbert's affliction, but it was a terrible matter, of which I did not care to speak, then I learned that we were to expect a youngster, after which I determined at all costs to prevent my wife from knowing, much less seeing, that my brother was cursed with so awful a lion-like face I was afraid, indeed, that the features might be reproduced in the child "

"Yes," said Ebbie, "you were wise in that respect "

"When I saw that my wife's suspicions had been aroused, I was at a loss to know what to do for the best, for it was now obviously impossible to explain at all, without explaining fully And so I brought my brother and Karamanga to this lonely spot in the hope of hiding them But now my brother has died of consumption, as is often the case with lepers, but how I shall explain things to Kathleen is more than I can say "

"If you will allow me to do that," suggested Old Ebbie, "I shall tell her simply that your brother had consumption, and that you were afraid that if she knew of his affliction she would insist upon going to him and that you were driven half frantic with fear lest she should contract the terrible disease I think you will find that that explanation will meet the case at the moment, especially as I will have a private word with Sir Robert, later, after the child is born, you can tell her the whole truth "

"You are very good," said Major Holmes, "I must stay here for a couple of days to see to the funeral arrangements, after that I shall return to London "

"In the meantime you may leave everything to me," said Old Ebbie, as he led the way through the door and out to our waiting motor-car

As the night train bore us south, Old Ebbie, who had telephoned to Mrs Holmes that all was well, lay back in his corner, drawing reflectively at his pipe

"You know, Hicks," he said, "this investigation has taught me a big lesson "

"Which is?" I queried

"That every single factor in a case has a certain significance At first I believed Mrs Holmes' description of a bestial-face, which

glared at her from an upstairs window, to be the product of an over-wrought imagination, alternatively the impression might have been created by a mask assumed by Karamanga as a disguise to scare away inquisitive intruders. It took the sight and smell of the Chaulmoogra oil, the presence of salt crystals in the bath and sodium chloride in the kitchen cupboard to enable me to infer the true connection between Major Holmes' medical missionary brother and the lion-faced man Mrs Holmes had seen looking out of the window of the house in the Friar's Stile Road "

Mr. Laxworthy

THE CASE OF MR. AND MRS. STETSON

By

E PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

MR JOHN T LAXWORTHY, Mr Forrest Anderson, and Sydney Wing were standing together upon the platform at Toulon. Mr Laxworthy was in one of his most enigmatic moods, and Sydney Wing, who acted always as courier to the little party, was beginning to get a trifle irritable. As yet he had received no precise instructions as to their destination.

"It is fate, beyond a doubt," he admitted, "which has caused the train for Marseilles and Paris to break down at Nice, and fate again which decrees that the Luxe, when it arrives, should have to wait here for twenty minutes. But meanwhile, the porter desires to know where we want our luggage registered to."

Mr Laxworthy drew his shawl a little closer around his neck.

"This Toulon station," he declared testily, "is the draughtiest place in Europe. Every time I spend a few minutes here I am terrified of a chill. I am conscious already of a tickling in my throat. Have you the formamint lozenges, Anderson?"

Mr Forrest Anderson produced a small bottle from his pocket. Mr Laxworthy gravely thrust one of the lozenges into his mouth.

"To London, Paris, or Monte Carlo?" Sydney Wing persisted.

It must be confessed that Mr Laxworthy, considering the reasonableness of the inquiry, treated it with indifference.

"What does it matter?" he asked. "There are adventures everywhere, even, no doubt, in Toulon. Let us cross the line and see the train from Paris arrive. We may, perhaps, see some one who will tell us whether it is raining in London. Other things being equal, why should not climatic conditions influence our destination? Your porter shall receive his orders, Sydney, in a quarter of an hour."

Thereupon Sydney Wing explained to the official in question that Monsieur desired to speak with a gentleman travelling from London, and that after a conversation with him immediate instructions concerning the luggage should be given. This information being accompanied by a preliminary *pourboire* of a substantial nature was accepted as entirely satisfactory, and the three travellers crossed the line.

The train de luxe from Paris had just thundered in. Notwithstanding the early hour, a fair number of passengers had already descended. These, however, instead of occupying themselves in the usual manner, by buying coffee or flowers, were standing about talking to one another or to any uniformed official who would stop to answer a question. All the way down the train other passengers, in various stages of *deshabille*, were to be seen peering curiously from behind cautiously raised blinds. Several of the attendants were talking together with the station-master and another official of the railway company. No less than four gendarmes, accompanied by an inspector, were drawn up opposite a certain compartment of the train.

"Something has happened," Mr. Forrest Anderson, with rare acumen, ventured to observe.

"A man has been killed—probably murdered," Mr. Laxworthy, who had been watching intently the inspector's lips, declared.

"I will go and get the tickets and our luggage registered to Monte Carlo," Sydney Wing decided promptly.

The inspector who was in charge of the gendarmes held a little informal court of inquiry upon the platform. Then he disappeared into the train. Presently his head was to be seen from a window. He beckoned to the four gendarmes who, with the air of men of consequence embarking upon a fateful errand, also mounted the train. Mr. Laxworthy a few moments later followed them. When he reappeared, he was looking a little annoyed. Mr. Anderson, who was drinking a cup of coffee, looked at him questioningly. The news had spread, and quite a surprising number of the blinds had been raised during the last few minutes. The station-master himself was examining the tickets of the two or three passengers who had descended.

"Raining hard in London," Mr. Laxworthy announced, gloomily. "Also a fog. Give me another formamint."

"Can't see that that makes any difference to us," Mr. Forrest Anderson remarked cheerfully, producing his little bottle. "It'll be all right at Monte, anyhow."

"It matters," Mr. Laxworthy declared, "because we happen to be going to London."

Mr. Anderson stared slightly, but he declined to be surprised.

"Not interested in this little affair, after all then?"

"On the contrary," Mr. Laxworthy replied, "I am very much interested in it. Only it is my opinion that monsieur the inspector, with his corps of gendarmes, is making rather a mistake in going on. Back to London is my idea. We shall see."

"What happened, anyhow?" Mr. Anderson asked.

"Unpleasant affair," Mr. Laxworthy explained with some relish. "Elderly English gentleman, travelling alone, chloroformed and

strangled in his sleeping berth Not a sound heard Attendants sleeping both ends of the car all night Empty pocket-book discovered at foot of bed Man's name Simonds Presumptive evidence that he was a bookmaker and was going to Monte Carlo to shoot pigeons "

"Is it known how much money he had with him?"

"Not to any of us," Mr Laxworthy answered dryly

"What are the gendarmes doing?" Mr Anderson inquired curiously

"Guarding the attendants and the passengers in the adjoining compartments till the train arrives at Nice," Mr Laxworthy announced "There the authorities will take the matter over "

"What about the passengers who have descended here?"

"There were only two," Mr Laxworthy replied "You can see them over there—the young couple waiting for the Hyères train The inspector has examined their tickets and asked them a few questions He has, apparently, no further interest in them "

Mr Anderson nodded He rather prided himself on his powers of intuition

"Honeymooners," he declared positively "New clothes, new luggage, man looking like a self-conscious ass, girl wearing a thick veil Look, he's buying her flowers See him squeeze her hand then?"

"Just a trifle overdone," Mr Laxworthy remarked critically

"Not bad, though The telegram will be a good test "

"What telegram?"

"He has arranged to have a telegram calling him back to London, delivered within a few minutes " Mr Laxworthy replied "He is looking about for it much too anxiously "

"Do you mean to say that these two are concerned in the murder?" Mr. Forrest Anderson asked in sudden amazement

"Of course they are!" Mr Laxworthy answered a little irritably "Why else should I have pointed them out to you? Let us walk up the platform a little distance—so Now back again Watch this man, my friend Here is psychological interest for you, if you like Such a chance may never occur to you again You can study at close quarters the features and deportment of a man who, within the last few minutes, mind—certainly within the last hour—has committed a brutal murder To the casual observer he seems callous and unconcerned, doesn't he? In reality he is nothing but a quivering mass of nerves and suspicions Did you see his face twitch just then?"

They passed within a few feet of the couple The man was young, of a little more than medium height, with broad shoulders, a brown moustache, and somewhat florid complexion His companion was slim and small Her figure was certainly girlish, but

she wore a veil of the pattern affected by travelling Americans, and very little of her face could be seen. She seemed certainly either shy or nervous. Her hands were linked in her husband's arm, and she kept whispering in his ear. They were both well enough dressed, but their clothes were a little obvious in their newness. Their deportment, too, when one studied it closely, was suspicious.

The man's exuberant good spirits were overdone, the girl's timidity was perhaps real, but the reason for it seemed insufficient. Mr Forrest Anderson was hugely interested. There was a new reverence in his tone as he addressed his wonderful master.

"Did you notice," he whispered, as they passed down the platform, "how the man's hand was shaking?" The cigarette, too, he was pretending to smoke, had been out for a long time."

Mr Laxworthy nodded.

"An amateur criminal," he decided, "beyond a doubt. Certain to be caught in the long run. How long will it be, I wonder," he continued in a tone almost of annoyance, "before these people who decide upon a criminal career realise that it is absolutely necessary for them to learn the A B C of their craft if they wish for any permanent success in it. It isn't reasonable to suppose that an affair like that"—Mr Laxworthy waved his hand toward the train—"can be successfully carried through by bunglers."

Sydney came hurrying up with the tickets, and met with a little surprise.

"You will keep one of these," Mr Laxworthy told him, "and proceed as far as Nice. You can wire us the course of events to the cloakroom, Lyons, and to Charing Cross Station. Anderson and I are returning to London."

It was one of the precepts instilled by his instructor into Mr Sydney Wing that surprise, however natural and reasonable it might be, was an emotion sedulously to be concealed. He handed the two tickets to Mr Laxworthy.

"You will be able to recover on these, sir," he remarked. "Am I to wait at Nice?"

"Use your own discretion," Mr Laxworthy replied. "I think that you will probably return."

Sydney hurried off to take his seat. In a moment or two the great train rolled slowly out of the station. From where Mr Laxworthy and his companion stood, they caught a glimpse of the fateful compartment, with its blind carefully lowered, and at the adjoining windows an impression of the gendarmes. Mr Forrest Anderson shivered a little.

"Poor fellow!" he muttered. "Off on a holiday, too. It's a brutal thing, this taking of life!"

"I can tell you one thing more sickening," Mr Laxworthy said slowly, "and that is the intense, awful anxiety of the man who

has committed a murder and who fears arrest The deed seems simple enough when it is planned, the chances of arrest remote The prize is great The man, naturally enough, if he is of sporting proclivities, backs himself to take the chance Then comes the afterwards The very air seems full of whispers New horrors are hatched in the brain A new set of fears is born, a shivering, hideous doubt of every human being poisons life I am sorry for the lump of clay they are taking on to Nice If I were in the habit, however, of feeling compassion for anybody, I should be more sorry still for the young man whom they are taking on to London There's his telegram, just on the point of being delivered See his clumsy air of surprise We will proceed to the other side "

"Are you not afraid," Mr Anderson asked, as they retraced their steps, "that even if we get on the same train they will not leave it somewhere en route Why should they go all the way to London?"

"Because London is the finest hiding-place for criminals in Europe," Mr. Laxworthy replied promptly "Furthermore, I saw him tell her that they would be in London to-morrow night "

Mr Laxworthy and his companion obtained seats in the train with some little difficulty They found themselves, however, in an empty compartment vacated by some passengers descending for Costabelle

"I wonder where our friends are," Mr Anderson remarked, as they proceeded to settle themselves down for the journey

Very soon they were to know There was the sound of a somewhat heated discussion in the next compartment Suddenly the young man himself appeared in the doorway

"Are these two seats engaged, sir?" he asked Mr Laxworthy

"They are not," Mr Laxworthy replied

The young man disappeared and presently ushered in his wife and began to pile up the rack with small articles of luggage

"Hope we're not disturbing you, sir," he said to Mr Laxworthy, "but the next carriage was full up, and there was an old French man near the window wouldn't have it moved Couldn't stick it at any price," he added, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead

"Foreigners are somewhat peculiar with regard to fresh air," Mr Laxworthy admitted "I am myself susceptible to draughts, but I am most opposed to anything in the nature of an overheated carriage Would the young lady care for my seat near the window!"

"Oh, please not!" she exclaimed "I am quite comfortable here It's such a relief not to hear all those people chattering a language you don't understand "

The two young people settled down for the journey. They occupied opposite seats on the corridor side of the carriage, and with their heads close together talked a good deal on matters apparently of frivolous import. For some reason or other, the nervousness which they had certainly exhibited on the platform at Toulon had completely vanished. The young man showed no signs of being anything else than what he appeared to be—a commonplace, healthy, middle-class person, probably a manufacturer or professional man from the country. The girl, who looked prettier without her hat, was a veritable type of the suburban belle. In opening her handbag to search for a handkerchief, a little shower of rice fell upon the floor. Their confusion, the girl's giggle, and the man's half-conscious glance towards Mr Laxworthy and his companion were perfectly done. Mr Laxworthy smiled upon them genially and in a few moments all four were in conversation. Their name, it appeared, was Stetson, and they had been married four days. The girl's home had been at Balham, and the man's at Manchester. The names of relatives and friends were freely mentioned. By the time they had passed Marseilles, the quartette were on such terms that Mr Laxworthy had ordered in a bottle of wine and some biscuits to drink the health of the newly-married couple.

"By the by," he remarked, "my friend and I thought we saw you waiting by the Hyères train."

It was the critical moment. Mr Laxworthy had asked his question with apparently unconscious but subtle suddenness. The embarrassment of the two, however, was tempered with smiles. With a hearty laugh the young man explained.

"We were going to Hyères," he said, "but, to tell you the truth, I've got a mother-in-law who is rather a nuisance to us. It was all we could do to stop her from starting on the honeymoon with us, and just an hour or so ago I had a telegram to say that she had gone to Hyères and was waiting for us there. We couldn't either of us stick it. We are going to pretend we didn't get the telegram and we are going back to Paris to spend the rest of our time there."

"Poor mother!" the girl murmured. "She'll be fearfully disappointed, but she really is a nuisance."

Mr Laxworthy commended their plan, and, the wine being finished, he dozed. The young couple went down for lunch early. They left their bags and small luggage scattered about the seats. Mr Anderson looked at his chief doubtfully. The tragedy of a mistake was a thing which as yet they had never encountered.

"Clever young couple, that," he remarked tentatively.

"They are either," Mr Laxworthy replied simply, "the cleverest young people I have ever met in my life, or"—his voice shook for a moment, he smothered his hesitation with a cough, it was not

a pleasant thing, this, which he had to say—"or," he concluded at last, "I have made a mistake"

Mr Anderson, who had made up his mind, said nothing They lunched almost in silence, and on their return surprised their fellow-travellers sitting very close together indeed The girl hid her face behind a magazine, the man grinned, unabashed Mr Laxworthy settled down into his corner with a premonition of disaster

"At Lyons," Mr Anderson whispered, "we shall receive a telegram"

Mr Laxworthy nodded He was remarkably sparing of speech for the remainder of that journey He had even given up watching his fellow-passengers At Lyons the telegram came He opened it with firm fingers, but he felt beforehand a grim conviction as to its contents It was dated from Nice a few hours back

"Attendant of train arrested Portion of murdered man's property found upon him Simple case—SYDNEY"

Mr Anderson coughed as he handed it back to his chief Mr Laxworthy faced the situation boldly The greatest men in the world had been famous for their mistakes

"Better get off with us at Paris, sir," the young man suggested, as they drew near the end of the journey "You and your friend, too We are going to the Grand Hotel Proud to entertain you there for a little supper Our first guests you'd be, eh, Edith?"

The young lady smiled amiably

"We'd be very glad indeed if you would," she declared "Henry always likes company Not that I blame him," she went on hastily "I'm fond of it myself"

Mr Laxworthy shook his head regretfully

"I am sorry," he said "My friend and I are travelling to London to keep a most important engagement"

"Bad luck!" the young man declared "Anyway, here's my card," he added, producing one "I've taken a little house up on Laking Heights, near Manchester Healthy situation, and near a golf club Look us up there if ever you come that way"

"I will do so with pleasure," Mr Laxworthy assured him "Permit me to offer you my own card," he added, drawing one from his case "I am rather a bird of passage, but when I am in London I can always be heard of at my club"

"I am a member of the Junior Conservative myself," the young man remarked "A club in town's always useful, even for a countryman"

His wife tossed her head

"You gentlemen and your clubs!" she exclaimed "Let me

tell you, Henry, your club isn't going to be much use to you. When you come up to London, I'm coming. I made that bargain with him," she added, turning to Mr Laxworthy, "before I consented to go and live at Manchester."

"Quite right," Mr Laxworthy murmured. "I feel sure that your husband's visits to the Metropolis will be more acceptable to him than ever with your charming society."

The train was drawing in to the platform at Paris. They all shook hands. The young man put his head back after their final farewells had been spoken.

"What did you say the French for porter was, sir?" he asked Mr Laxworthy.

Mr Laxworthy stepped out on to the platform and played the part of kindly courier to the young people. He watched them drive off in a cab before he returned to his seat.

"My friend," he said to Anderson, "I am now going to sleep. In the morning let us settle down to forget this little incident. A few days in London will be good for us."

Mr Anderson agreed, with enthusiasm.

"I shall turn in myself presently," he declared.

The remainder of the journey was uneventful. On the following morning, having collected their luggage, Mr Anderson presented himself at the cloakroom at Charing Cross, in case there should be any further telegrams from Sydney. He came back to Mr Laxworthy with two. The first which he opened was unexpectedly long.

"It's in our cipher!" Mr Anderson exclaimed.

"I have the book here," Mr Laxworthy remarked. "Let us go into the refreshment room and sit down."

They found a small table and Mr Laxworthy ordered a glass of milk and an apple. With the book before him, he commenced to decode the message. Except for one startled exclamation from Mr Anderson, they neither of them spoke till their task was completed. Mr Laxworthy's fingers, however, trembled slightly as he traced out the last few words. This message, also, was from Nice.

"A thousand congratulations and apologies. Attendant only accomplice. Has made full confession. Murder was committed by famous American criminal, Greenlaw, travelling with young woman, posing as honeymooners. Capture of Greenlaw a veritable triumph. Once more my humble congratulations—SYDNEY."

Mr Laxworthy looked at his companion across the table. Mr Anderson was speechless.

"I asked him once," Mr Laxworthy said slowly, "whether he had travelled in America. I fancied I caught the suspicion of an accent. What is in the other telegram?"

Mr. Anderson, who had forgotten it, tore open the envelope. They read it together. It was dated from Paris in the early hours of the morning.

"Have just drunk your health at a pleasant little supper party—MR AND MRS STETSON, OF MANCHESTER."

"I think," Mr Laxworthy said, rising, "that we will go round to the hotel now. I shall lie down for an hour or so. I feel that I need rest."

II

MR LAXWORTHY spent the greater part of his time during the next few days in a state of curious absorption. He did not stir out from the small suite at the Milan which had been reserved for him. Mr Anderson, who was used to his ways, went to his club for bridge in the afternoons and visited the theatres in the evening. On the third day, Sydney Wing arrived. Mr Anderson met him at the station and explained the situation. They discussed it gloomily.

"Our chief," Mr Forrest Anderson remarked, as they drove to the hotel, "is suffering from profound mortification. As you know, since our association with him, at any rate, this is his first failure."

"I would have given a good deal," Sydney Wing declared wistfully, "to have seen you four in the railway carriage."

Mr Anderson smiled grimly.

"It was," he admitted, "the most superb piece of acting I have ever seen. Until all these particulars about the man came out in the newspapers during the last few days, I must admit that the whole affair was absolutely incomprehensible. Now we know that he, too, understands the lip language."

"And many other tricks as well," Sydney remarked. "They say that no one else in the world has been so skilful at disguises. There isn't a reliable description of the fellow in existence."

"I could give a pretty close one," Mr Anderson grunted. "I sat within a couple of yards of the fellow for the best part of twelve hours."

Sydney shook his head.

"According to those detectives down there, his changes of appearance are almost miraculous."

"Is the identity of the girl known?" Mr Anderson asked
Sydney shook his head

"It is through his penchant for women that they hope to catch him some day," he replied "They say that this last enterprise must have brought him in over ten thousand pounds"

Their cab rolled into the courtyard at the Milan

"I'm not at all sure," Mr Forrest Anderson said doubtfully, "whether the chief will see you However, we must let him know that you have arrived"

They ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of Mr Laxworthy's sitting-room Mr Anderson barely repressed an exclamation of surprise Mr Laxworthy was sitting before a table covered with notes and newspapers A visitor who had very much the air of a detective was just departing Mr Laxworthy welcomed his two friends briskly

"Sit down, Sydney, if you please," he invited "I have a list here of thirty questions to ask you Afterwards I shall require to be alone for an hour or two Kindly understand that I shall want every moment of your time for the next four days at least"

"Glad to hear it, sir," Sydney replied cheerfully

Mr Laxworthy seemed anxious to hear every incident which had happened at Nice, and every item of gossip, even the idlest, concerning the man Greenlaw He made notes of some of Sydney's replies and dismissed him finally with a little wave of the hand

"I have a little work to do privately," he announced "At six o'clock I shall want you both You, Anderson, had better be prepared for a journey I may want you to go to Paris"

"You are going for Mr Greenlaw, then?" Mr Anderson asked briskly

"We are going, without a doubt," Mr Laxworthy declared, "to assist the police in the capture of a criminal of that name"

III

MR FORREST ANDERSON left for Paris by the night train, with a sealed letter of instructions in his pocket, not to be opened until he had actually arrived in the city Sydney Wing was invited to call upon his chief at nine o'clock that same evening He found Mr Laxworthy with a letter spread out before him upon the table

"Come in, Sydney, and close the door," the latter directed "Anderson has gone, eh?"

"He left by the nine o'clock train, sir," Sydney replied

Mr Laxworthy cleared his throat

"As you may have surmised," he began, "we are interested in

the case of this man Greenlaw My friend John Marlin has been giving me some interesting information You have heard me speak of John Marlin? He is now deputy-inspector at Scotland Yard "

"I remember him perfectly, sir," Sydney agreed

Mr Laxworthy took up a few notes which lay by his side

"It seems that Scotland Yard has been trying to arrest this man for the last three years, and for the last twelve months, at least, there has been a detective over here from New York, looking for no one else The fellow has great gifts, without a doubt, but success has made him over-confident What do you think of this for bravado? It is addressed to Detective Marlin and was delivered to him at Scotland Yard He brought it to me here only a few hours ago "

Mr. Laxworthy read out the letter .

"MY DEAR FRIEND MARLIN,

"You fellows make me tired There's no fun to be had over on this side, so I'm off home, and pretty quick, too You've been after me for three years and I've never had even to hurry to get out of your way You've seven jobs up against me, most of them 'lifers,' but you're just about as slow as that old dead-head from New York, who has been trapesing after me for the Lord knows how long! Now see here, I'm a bit of a sport, and I'm going to give you your last chance There's some money of mine lying in London, and I'm coming over myself to fetch it on Tuesday, May 15 I shan't tell you by what train, or where I am going to stay, but it will probably be at one of your best hotels Now do make one last effort. It would really give me a thrill to meet you face to face and read suspicion in your eye Come, why should we not take a drink together? I will make an assignation with you I am very fond of a glass of vermouth before my dinner Between six and seven each evening I am in London, I shall call either at the bar of the Milan Hotel, the Metropolitan Bar, or Fitzhenry's Shall I say au revoir?—Yours,

"DAN GREENLAW "

"Do you believe that he means to come?" Sydney asked eagerly

Mr Laxworthy did not reply for a moment He appeared to be deep in thought

"Marlin himself," he said at last, "has not the slightest faith in the letter He believes it to be a complete hoax That, however, is not to be wondered at Marlin's limitations are almost too pain-

fully obvious. He is entirely destitute of a sense of humour. It is one of my theories that without a sense of humour no man can succeed in any profession which brings him in touch with his fellows."

"And you, sir, what do you believe?" Sydney persisted.

"I believe that he will come," Mr Laxworthy declared. "I have thought this matter out very carefully indeed. I have come to a certain conclusion. I may be wrong. We shall see. On the other hand, if I am right, it will, I must confess, afford me a peculiar satisfaction. I shall not easily forget that journey from Toulon."

"What will there be for me to do?" Sydney asked.

"To-morrow," Mr Laxworthy replied, "is Tuesday. Marlin, of course, is all for watching trains, and that sort of thing. Quite useless, in my opinion. Greenlaw, if he comes, will probably travel by motor-car from some insignificant port. I have some idea of asking you to frequent the bar rooms which he mentions, with the exception of the Milan. I will attend to that myself."

"Are there any descriptions of the man?" Sydney asked. "I know his height, which I suppose he cannot alter—six foot exactly—and they say he is fairly broad, and his natural complexion is florid."

Mr Laxworthy touched a little pile of papers by his side.

"There are seventeen descriptions here from Scotland Yard," he remarked. "They vary slightly in detail, but they are all much about the same. They are, I imagine, the chief reason for the wonderful confidence which this man Greenlaw displays."

"You don't believe that they are accurate, then?" Sydney inquired. "Yet Anderson's description of the fellow coincided exactly with this."

Mr Laxworthy nodded thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, "I have an idea of my own. I have mentioned it to Marlin, but he only laughs at me. Nothing remains but for me to test it myself."

"Are there no instructions for me, sir?" Sydney asked.

"None for this evening," Mr Laxworthy replied. "To-morrow I shall require you to be my companion. We will go round to a few of these bars. To-night I shall retire early. I drank a little Chablis with my lunch which has not wholly agreed with me. I shall not dine this evening."

Mr Laxworthy, on the following evening, drank vermouth at Fitzhenry's, mixed vermouth at the Metropolitan, and a cocktail at the Milan, without the slightest result. He dined alone, in a very bad temper, went to bed early, and received this letter next morning.

"MY DEAR OLD LADY,

"So you are in the game, too! It made my heart ache this evening to see you trotting round to these bars and peering into every strange face from behind those disfiguring spectacles of yours. Besides, at your time of life three apéritifs are extremely bad for the digestion. I can assure you that I felt quite guilty when I saw you struggling with your third.

"Come now, to-morrow night I will have mercy. We will leave out the Metropolitan. I don't know how it struck you, but I didn't care for the place at all. A very mixed crowd, and I had my doubts of the vermouth. We will visit Fitzhenry's and the Milan only. Who knows but that we may have luck and drink our cocktail together?—

"Ever yours,
"D G"

Mr Laxworthy's eyes sparkled as he read.

"This is indeed worth while," he said to himself. "He has the real instincts, this man."

Mr Laxworthy showed this letter to several mysterious personages from Scotland Yard, and to Sydney Wing. They all treated it in the same manner. Scotland Yard concentrated upon the Metropolitan, and from six till half-past seven every harmless stranger who drank his cocktail or sherry and bitters there was subjected to a very searching and inquisitive scrutiny. Mr Laxworthy, on the other hand, obeyed strictly the invitation of his letter. He visited Fitzhenry's first, and after half an hour there drove to the Milan. From the small smoke-room it was possible to see into the American Bar through a glass swing-door. Mr Laxworthy peered into the room and stood for an instant quite still. A very small and apparently a very young gentleman of Indian extraction was leaning against the counter with a cocktail before him. Mr. Laxworthy turned to Sydney, who accompanied him.

"Sydney," he said, "the thing is finished. You see those two men in the corner of the smoke-room?"

Mr Laxworthy pointed out two harmless-looking individuals who were talking together upon a settee.

Sydney nodded. At that moment, one of them looked up cautiously. Mr Laxworthy beckoned to them. They came over at once.

"You will hold this door," he directed in a low tone. "The man for whom we are seeking is inside."

"Let me go in with you, sir," Sydney begged.

Mr Laxworthy assented. They approached the bar. The young man who was leaning against the counter was dressed in the

height of fashion His silk hat was exceedingly glossy, his shirt front immaculate He was really very little darker than an ordinary olive-skinned Englishman He eyed the new-comers a trifle insolently, and turned to his cocktail Mr Laxworthy stood by his side

"Will you give me a cocktail—the same as you have mixed for this gentleman, if you please?" Mr Laxworthy ordered

The girl mixed it in silence As they all three stood there, a somewhat curious change took place in the attitude of the young man He slipped furtively back from the counter Mr Laxworthy turned suddenly towards him

"My friend," he said, "Daniel Greenlaw, or Mrs Stetson, or whatever it pleases you to call yourself this evening, I have come to take my *apéritif* with you Our friends outside can wait There are so many questions it would interest me to ask you "

Mr Laxworthy was absolutely prepared, and he was, without doubt, extraordinarily proficient in all the ordinary tricks of wrestling and *juu-jitsu* Nevertheless, he was lying two seconds later upon his back in the bar The young man sprang for the door, saw the two figures waiting there for him and hesitated The moment's hesitation was fatal Sydney's arms were round him from behind Even then he struggled like a wild cat, and it took the united efforts of the three men to secure him Marlin arrived just as the struggle was over He shook his head doubtfully as he saw their prisoner

"This isn't Greenlaw," he exclaimed

Mr Laxworthy smiled

"You take him along," he directed, "and I promise you that when he is brought up before the magistrates to-morrow morning I will prove that he is Greenlaw half a dozen times over "

Mr Laxworthy dined that night in the *café* with Mr Forrest Anderson, who had returned from Paris, and Sydney Wing He was in high good humour

"I don't see, even now," Mr Forrest Anderson remarked, "how you guessed the truth "

Mr Laxworthy sipped his wine with the air of a connoisseur

"You see," he explained, "the man has been wanted for three years No one has ever laid their hands upon him Every description of him is the same Naturally I began to wonder whether something might not be wrong with that description I read up all the notes about him that were collected by Scotland Yard, and I noticed that although he had the reputation of having endless women friends, he was invariably accompanied by a small dark woman, especially when any particularly startling outrage was on foot It just occurred to me as both possible and ingenious that the man might have concealed his identity all these years and

gone about as his own companion. His Mrs Stetson was certainly wonderfully done, but there were one or two flaws, and when I came to put everything together I felt pretty certain that my guess was a true one. Marlin and his men were looking everywhere for a big man. I was looking for the real, unknown Greenlaw—a small, dark man in any plausible form of disguise. The fellow's last little piece of bravado will cost him his life."

A porter from outside came up and addressed Mr Laxworthy. "I beg your pardon, sir," he announced, "but there is an important telephone message for you from the Charing Cross Hospital."

Mr Laxworthy rose deliberately from his place and followed the man out of the room. He stepped into the telephone box and held the receiver to his ear.

"Is that Mr Laxworthy?" a voice inquired.

"Yes?"

"I am Dr Wendell, of the Charing Cross Hospital," the voice continued. "I am requested to give you a message by a man named Marlin who has just been brought in, badly hurt."

"What is it?" Mr Laxworthy asked.

"He wishes me to tell you," the doctor continued, "that Greenlaw is free. He has stabbed one policeman and hurt Marlin badly. He escaped from the cab, and so far they have not been able to recapture him. Marlin wants you to be exceedingly careful, as this man Greenlaw, whoever he may be, will probably feel that he has a grudge against you. Excuse me, if you please, I am in a hurry."

Mr Laxworthy laid down the receiver and went back to his dinner.

Inspector O Rater

THE MIND READERS

By

EDGAR WALLACE

THERE IS no police force in the world that can counter the intelligent law-breaker," wrote that remarkable man Len Witlon, in an article he once contributed to the American Press, "providing he lays his plans carefully and skilfully and carries them through without deviation."

Len Witlon knew five languages perfectly, and had friends and sometimes confederates in at least a dozen European prisons. He himself had certainly been under detention, but had never been dishonoured by a conviction.

You met him at the American bar of Claridge's in Paris, or dining at Armonvillier, occasionally he took a cure at Vichy or Baden-Baden—there were certain mud baths in Czecho-Slovakia that he visited regularly. He was a vain and brilliant man, very jealous of his reputation for gallantry.

"To be successful in robbery one must be something of a psychologist. It is not sufficient to know where material danger is to be found—one must be able to read the mind of one's opponent. That is the art of generalship: success comes when the operator combines with his powers of organisation a firm and unswerving loyalty to his comrades."

Inspector O Rater read this interesting article so often that he could almost quote it word for word. He had cut out the article soon after its publication, had pasted it in an exercise book against the day when Len would commence operations in England.

"Tell that friend of yours," said the Orator, to a familiar of the great man, "that if he ever puts his nose inside of London he won't be giving interviews for fourteen years."

One day Len took up the challenge.

A policeman came through Burford Square at a leisurely pace, moving towards the corner of Canford Street. He had arranged with the constable patrolling the next beat to meet him there at eleven and finish the interrupted story of a brother-in-law's shortcomings, and the problem of the wife and three children who had been left unsupported by the aforesaid brother-in-law's hasty departure for Canada.

He came to the rendezvous at almost the same moment as his mate appeared. And the serial was continued

"... 'Well,' I says to my sister, 'you've only got yourself to blame

He stopped dead

The scream came from one of the dark houses of the square, and not very far away.

"Murder . . . murder!"

The two police officers were already running . . . On the doorstep of No 95 a girl was standing. They saw the white of her nightgown in the dim light of a street lamp

"Help . . . please! Oh, thank God you've come!"

She retreated before them through the open door into the dark hall

"I heard him scream . . . and the struggle . . . and I tried to get into his room . . ."

She had been feeling for the switch, and she found it. A big glass lantern suspended from the high ceiling glowed with a golden light

"What is it, miss? Which room?"

Her trembling fingers pointed to the stairway.

She was very pretty, though as white as chalk, the officer observed

"Put a coat on the lady, Harry"—he indicated a little alcove where hats and coats were hanging. "Now, miss, you'll have to show us the room."

She shook her head; her eyes were wide with horror.

"No, no, no! I can't . . . It is the first landing—the room overlooking the square——"

The two uniformed men raced up the stairs, as they reached the square landing, a light came on, probably controlled from the hall below, for there was a push-button switch on the wall of the landing and nobody could have touched that. Facing them was a polished mahogany door with an ornamental gilt and enamelled door knob

P C Simpson (he of the wronged sister) turned the handle. The door was locked from the inside. He shook the handle vigorously and called out

"Open this door!"

A futile invitation, and laughable in any other state of affairs. More futile, since when he turned the knob the door opened

It was a large room, running the whole width of the house. Light came from a crystal chandelier. P C Simpson saw a big gilt and mahogany writing-table, behind that was a carved marble fireplace, and on the white hearth an electric fire glowed redly. Until they passed round the table, they did not see the quiet figure that lay, face upwards. It was in evening dress, one hand gripped the

edge of the marble curb that surrounded the fireplace, the other was half-raised, as though to ward off a blow

"He's dead—shot look!"

Simpson's companion pointed to the patch of blood above the heart

P C Simpson stared down at his first murder, all too aware of the tremendous importance to him and to his career, he had a confused memory of instructions he had received as to what a policeman should do in such circumstances

"Don't let nobody come in," he said huskily, and gaped round the room. A long window was open—he stepped out on to a balcony, flashing his electric lamp along the rails

A rope was knotted to the balcony rail and trailing down—as he saw by the rays of his lamp—to the front steps. It had not been there when they had come in or they must have knocked against it

"He's got away since we came in, Harry. Come down with me!"

They flew down the stairs into the silent square, they did not see the girl, she must have gone to her room

The front door was closed. P C Simpson jerked at it with confidence, but this door did not open. He twisted the handle and pulled again, but it was a very heavy door, steel-lined, and did not budge

"It's been double-locked on the inside," he said, truthfully. "That girl must have done it, Harry. Go and see her and get the key."

Harry tried the nearest door, that was locked, and the second door was locked, but the door leading into the back of the house was open. It took him down to a kitchen, and his electric lamp showed him yet another door wide open. He guessed it was the garage, the big gates leading to the mews were swinging idly in the breeze

He went back to his companion

"You wait here," said P C Simpson, flew down the stairs, and in a few seconds was in the mews

With shaking hand he dragged his police whistle from his pocket, and sent out a shrill warning, circumnavigated the house in time to see three policemen running, and ahead of them a stolid, tall figure

Inspector Rater had business of his own in the neighbourhood that night, but had surrendered all other interest at the alarm. Breathlessly the police-constable told his story as he half-ran, half-walked back to the mews

"All right, all right," said the Orator impatiently. "One of you fellows stand in front of the door and don't move."

He followed Simpson into the house, up to the ground floor. Harry the policeman stood rigidly to attention at the foot of the stairs.

"Where's the lady? Have you seen her?"

Harry had not seen her or heard her. He ventured the suggestion that she must be "in a faint," for he was a family man, and knew the effects of such events upon the weak frame of womanhood.

The Orator was half-way up the stairs, and missed the plausible explanation.

"That's the room, sir."

Inspector Rater turned the handle and pushed.

"Locked," he said and, stooping, squinted through the keyhole.

He could see that the door to the balcony was open, and asked a question.

"I left it like that, sir. There was a rope tied to the rails of the balcony. The man who done it must have got out that way, sir——"

"Lend your shoulders to the door," said the Orator.

Two strong men pushed together—and again. The lock broke with a snap, the door flew open.

"Where's your body?"

P.C. Simpson stared where the dead man had lain. There was no dead man. The room was entirely empty.

The Orator looked at the policeman, at the floor and then at the window; and then his mind instantly moved to the house of the Marquis Parelo, which was on the opposite side of the square. He thought of the Marquise Parelo naturally for two reasons: the first was that Len Witton was in town, and the second that in the Marquis's house, in a safe, and not a very safe safe, were four packets of cut emeralds that had arrived in London a few days before. They were in transit to an illustrious person in Italy who had a passion for emeralds, and had been purchased in the Argentine at great cost. The Marquis had notified the police, and Mr. O. Rater had thought it desirable to station a uniformed constable before and behind the house. He knew the names of those constables, and, leaning over the balcony, he addressed the small gathering of police officers on the pavement below.

"Is Walton here?"

"Yes, sir," said a voice.

"And Martin?"

"Yes, sir," said another voice.

"Then," asked the Orator gently, "why the hell *are* you here?"

He was very hurt, because he knew just how quickly Len Witton worked. He did not wait for the door to be opened, but slid down the rope on to the steps, and five minutes later was knocking at the door of the Marquis Perello's house. He knocked

for a very long time. The Marquis and his wife were at the theatre. The three maidservants were locked in a room upstairs. The armed valet who kept guard over the safe was found bludgeoned in the drawing-room, and the safe was open.

"He worked four-handed," said the Orator philosophically.

Len Witlon invariably worked four-handed, so the Orator had made no great discovery. And after a job was done the four would separate and leave England by various routes. There is, for example, a steamer that goes from Dundee to Holland, and yet another that sails from Plymouth to one of the French ports—Len never made the mistake of following the beaten track. His methods were unique: nobody but Len would have taken a furnished house in Burford Square and staged an elaborate murder mystery in order to bring all the police in the neighbourhood running to that one particular spot and leave unguarded the place he wished to burgle.

A search of the house revealed nothing of value except—in the fireplace of the dining-room were a number of burnt papers, and a little slip printed in red which was only half-burnt. It had apparently to do with passengers and guides and the difficulties of Customs. He put the little slip in his pocket very carefully and sent forth widespread enquiries. The only clue he had—and that came to him the next morning—was from a constable of the City police who, standing at the junction of Queen Victoria Street and Cannon Street, had seen a car in which was a woman. He was not even certain it was a woman, but she had that appearance, for her head and the upper part of her body were enclosed in a frock. She was, in point of fact, at the moment he saw her, engaged in slipping on a dress.

Cannon Street Station drew blank, no woman had arrived in a car at that hour. She had obviously gone east of Cannon Street.

The Orator was something of a psychologist himself. He knew Witlon's method's, and knew that that gallant gentleman would first assure himself that his beautiful lady confederate was safe. He interviewed P C Simpson, a crestfallen and resentful man, from whom his first murder had been ruthlessly snatched.

"Yes, sir, she talked with a sort of foreign accent."

"I want you to remember every word she said, Simpson," said the Orator gently.

P C Simpson thought very hard, trying to coax, by a vigorous massage of his head, the half-forgotten facts of the conversation.

"I can't remember anything she said, sir. The only thing that struck me as curious was that while she was a-moaning and a-groaning she had her eye on her wrist-watch. I saw her look twice."

"The time was about eleven, I think?"

The constable thought it was a little later.

"To me," said the Orator, "it is as clear as daylight"

When P C Simpson had gone, the Orator took from an envelope the little half-burned slip of printed paper that had been found in the grate of the dining-room, and reconstructed it . . .

Early one morning, somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, a British destroyer came up over the horizon behind the slow-moving steamship *Emil* and signalled the captain to stop. The *Emil* was a small ship that carried a large number of pleasure-seeking passengers to the Moroccan ports and Madeira. She had left London at midnight on the night of the robbery, and the pretty Anglo-Spanish girl who had already become the belle of the ship had joined the *Emil* just before she cast off from one of the London docks. Miss Avilez protested vigorously against her arrest, but rather blotted her copy-book by attempting to throw a small package overboard—a piece of extravagance on her part, since the package contained seventeen perfectly cut emeralds, none of which was under ten carats.

The matron who looked after her on the destroyer brought her to London and to Mr Rater. She replied to all his questions with the hauteur proper to a daughter of hidalgos.

The next morning there appeared in the London Press a communication very carefully composed by the Orator himself. He wrote at greater length than he spoke.

"Part of the proceeds of the Burford Square robbery have been recovered by the arrest of a woman calling herself Inez Avilez. It appears that the leader of the gang responsible for this cleverly planned robbery, whilst he was careful of his own skin, had not only sent the woman on a route where she could be easily traced, but had left evidence—possibly with the idea of using her as a decoy to draw attention from himself—to her destination."

On the day following the pretty Anglo-Spaniard's conviction (she was a British subject from Gibraltar) a second inspired paragraph appeared:

"This woman was deliberately sacrificed by the man who planned the robbery, and goes to prison to bear the punishment for his crime."

It was a clumsily written paragraph, and there were several sub-editors who would have liked to alter it a little, but the Orator knew his man, though he might not have recognised Mr Len Witton if he had seen him pacing the floor of his expensive suite in Aix, crazily incoherent, planning vengeance for the insult that had been put upon him.

"I've got Witlon," reported the Orator laconically.

And yet his superiors knew there was nothing in the world to associate Witlon with the robbery. He had his perfectly turned alibis, and witnesses to prove his presence in France at the hour the emeralds were stolen.

"I'm a mind-reader, too," said the Orator, when they asked him for an explanation, "and just at this moment I'm reading Witlon's. What he's saying about me at this minute is enough to make me turn in my grave. Only I'm not dead."

Mr Len Witlon had a brilliant associate, one John B Stummings, who came at the request of his master to Aix, not knowing the condition of Mr Len Witlon's mind.

"Too bad about Inez," said Mr Stummings as he came into the ornate sitting-room and closed the door. "Clever kid that I'll bet this man Rater framed up something on her——"

"This man Rater couldn't frame a picture," spluttered Len, his ordinarily good-looking face swollen and purple with anger. "Rater! They call him the Orator, don't they! I'll make him talk! Look at this!"

He slammed down two press cuttings before his visitor. "He couldn't get anything on me. The Sureté came after me the next morning, and there was I snug in bed in my villa at Auteuil."

"Up in Paris," said John B, "they talk about asking you to leave France——"

"Leave nothing! They know I wouldn't touch a thing in France. I'm going to England to see this Rater fellow."

Mr Stummings looked at him curiously.

"Count me out," he said. "Take one ticket—single. You're going dippy."

The absurdity of the very suggestion that it was not a brilliant idea brought a fleeting smile to the angry man.

"Listen! You know me! I know just what that fellow's thinking. I've got right behind the thing he calls his mind. John, do you remember when I went after the Infanta's pearls and then went back to Madrid four days after? Did anybody know me or recognise me? I'm going to show you my biggest bit of work."

He might have added his ugliest, for in a tempestuous and sleepless night he had designed a crime that had no equal in his brilliant record.

A week later there arrived in London an elderly English gentleman who gave his name at the best London hotel as Colonel Pershin. He had a British passport, he was apparently a fussy, rather quick-tempered man, who had a special business in life. He stayed at the Wheetham Hotel, which was at once the most obscure and the most fashionable in London, and he read the newspapers with great industry.

A few days after his arrival Mr Rater received a scented letter. It was written by a lady who signed herself "One who Knows," and it ran

If you wish to know where the rest of the Parello emeralds are to be found, I can tell you. I want you to promise me that I shall not be arrested, but knowing that a police officer cannot make any such promises I cannot ask you to put that into writing. I will come to Scotland Yard at 8 o'clock on Saturday evening. Will you be in your room?

The Orator read and re-read the communication. Where women were concerned he believed in miracles. And yet he was satisfied in his mind that behind the letter was the inspiration of Mr Witlon. For a long, long time he stood by his window looking on to the Embankment, staring at the river, and thinking himself into the mind of his enemy.

There was at the Yard at this time a most unpopular Assistant Commissioner, who did not like the Orator. Major Dawlton had had his police training in India. He was an incurable theorist, and had a weakness for interfering with his executive. He summoned the Orator into his office.

"Come, come, Mr Rater," he said, a little pompously. "This won't do at all. Here are emeralds of an enormous value stolen under the eyes of the police, after you had been specifically instructed to protect their owner! Have you seen this morning's newspapers?"

"I can't read"—said the Orator wearily, and waited long enough for the Assistant Commissioner to get apoplectic before he concluded—"newspapers when I have got work on hand."

"It is a scandal, Mr Rater. Really, I am ashamed to meet my friends at the club. They are constantly asking me why we don't get detectives in from outside. And I think it would be an excellent scheme."

"You don't want detectives, you want mind-readers to deal with Witlon," said the Orator again.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Major Dawlton.

It was a very peaceful Saturday afternoon at Scotland Yard. The day was warm and the double windows that shut out the noises of the Thames Embankment were wide open. Sunshine bathed the deserted wharves and warehouses that form so fine a skyline on the southern bank, and laid on the river a sheet of fretted gold.

The tramway-cars were more or less empty, the promenade given over to leisurely sight-seeing folk who had brought their children for a stroll.

Inspector Rater took off his pince-nez with a sigh, folded the

minute he had been reading and returned it to its envelope. He gazed pensively through the open window. A tug drawing a string of barges was moving slowly upstream. Timber barges stacked high with planks of yellow pine. On the Embankment a few loungers leaned over the parapet.

He turned his head as the door opened and Major Dawlton came in. Without a word he handed the letter to his superior. The Major fixed his eyeglass, read and sneered.

"That, I suppose, is the art of criminal detection," he said, with heavy irony—the Orator was very unpopular at that moment. "Half the good work at Scotland Yard is done by informers. I should like to see this woman when she comes."

"If she comes," said the Orator softly.

"You think it is a hoax? I don't agree. It is probably some jealous confederate who has been badly treated. These scraps of information have come to the Yard every day since I have been here."

"They have come every day I've been here," said the Orator, "and that's seventeen years."

The Major snorted under this implication of his inexperience.

"She won't come, but he will."

"Witlon? Rubbish! He's in France. That sort of scoundrel is not going to put his nose into this country, and if he did we've sufficient evidence to convict him of simple larceny. I'll be here at eight o'clock this evening."

"Make it a quarter to," suggested the Orator, venom in his eye.

Major Dawlton, sitting in the office chair, yawned.

"She's sold you," he said.

"I told you not to come," said Mr. Rater.

He stood with his back to the wall, glooming down at the Assistant Commissioner thoughtfully. The Major looked at his watch.

"I'll give her another quarter of an hour——"

"Whee-e-smack!"

Something whizzed past him, he felt the disturbance of air, and turning his startled head, saw the glass of a framed photograph splinter disastrously.

There was no sound of a shot—no report.

He was on his feet in an instant and ran to the window.

Something struck the sill on which his hand rested, ripped a jagged wound in the stone and brought down the plaster from the ceiling.

"I'd keep away from that window," said the Orator gently.

"They tell me he's a wonderful rifle shot, but I thought he'd

operate from the Council building The barge was certainly a brilliant idea "

Major Dawlton's face was white as death

"Shooting!" he gasped "At me!"

"At me," said the Orator pensively "I hope those fellows have located him I should think they would "

As he spoke he saw two motor-launches filled with men shoot out from the cover of the parapet, they were making for the barge

"That's all right," said the Orator "Now we've got something to charge him with "

"They were shooting at me!" squeaked the Major

"I told you not to come," said Mr Rater, but the joy in his eyes belied his tone of sympathy

"The general idea was a good one," said the Orator to the Chief Commissioner, "Wilton knew my weakness for fresh air, and he must have made a reconnaissance and seen how easy it was to look into my room with the window open Oh, yes, I knew he was in England—one of my men picked him up when he landed at Southampton from Havre "

The Chief Commissioner's stern gaze was fixed on the Orator

"But you didn't dream he'd be shooting into your room, or you wouldn't have allowed the Major to come?" he said

The Orator did not answer immediately Then he sighed

"I suppose I wouldn't," he said

Dr Fell

THE WRONG PROBLEM

By

JOHN DICKSON CARR

At the Detectives' Club it is still told how Dr Fell went down into the valley in Somerset that evening and of the man with whom he talked in the twilight by the lake, and of murder that came up as though from the lake itself. The truth about the crime has long been known, but one question must always be asked at the end of it.

The village of Grayling Dene lay a mile away towards the sunset. And the rear windows of the house looked out towards it. This was a long gabled house of red brick, lying in a hollow of the shaggy hills, and its bricks had darkened like an old painting. No lights showed inside, although the lawns were in good order and the hedges trimmed.

Behind the house there was a long gleam of water in the sunset, for the ornamental lake—some fifty yards across—stretched almost to the windows. In the middle of the lake, on an artificial island, stood a summer-house. A faint breeze had begun to stir, despite the heat, and the valley was alive with a conference of leaves.

The last light showed that all the windows of the house, except one, had little lozenge-shaped panes. The one exception was a window high up in a gable, the highest in the house, looking out over the road to Grayling Dene. It was barred.

Dusk had almost become darkness when two men came down over the crest of the hill. One was large and lean. The other, who wore a shovel-hat, was large and immensely stout, and he loomed even more vast against the skyline by reason of the great dark cloak billowing out behind him. Even at a distance you might hear the chuckles that animated his several chins and ran down the ridges of his waistcoat. The two travellers were engaged (as usual) in a violent argument. At intervals the larger one would stop and hold forth oratorically for some minutes, flourishing his cane. But, as they came down past the lake and the blind house, both of them stopped.

"There's an example," said Superintendent Hadley. "Say what you like, it's a bit too lonely for me. Give me the town——"

"We are not alone," said Dr Fell.

The whole place had seemed so deserted that Hadley felt a

slight start when he saw a man standing at the edge of the lake. Against the reddish glow on the water they could make out that it was a small man in neat dark clothes and a white linen hat. He seemed to be stooping forward, peering out across the water. The wind went rustling again, and the man turned round.

"I don't see any swans," he said. "Can you see any swans?" The quiet water was empty.

"No," said Dr. Fell, with the same gravity. "Should there be any?"

"There should be one," answered the little man, nodding. "Dead. With blood on its neck. Floating there."

"Killed?" asked Dr. Fell, after a pause. He has said afterwards that it seemed a foolish thing to say, but that it seemed appropriate to that time between the lights of the day and the brain.

"Oh, yes," replied the little man, nodding again. "Killed, like others—human beings. Eye, ear and throat. Or perhaps I should say ear, eye and throat, to get them in order."

Hadley spoke with some sharpness.

"I hope we're not trespassing. We knew the land was enclosed, of course, but they told us that the owners were away and wouldn't mind if we took a short cut. Fell, don't you think we'd better——?"

"I beg your pardon," said the little man, in a voice of such cool sanity that Hadley turned round again. From what they could see in the gloom, he had a good face, a quiet face, a somewhat ascetic face, and he was smiling. "I beg your pardon," he repeated in a curiously apologetic tone. "I should not have said that. You see, I have been far too long with it. I have been trying to find the real answer for 30 years. As for the trespassing myself, I do not own this land, although I lived here once. There is, or used to be, a bench here somewhere. Can I detain you for a little while?"

Hadley never quite realised afterwards how it came about. But such was the spell of the hour, or of the place, or of the sincere, serious little man in the white linen hat, that it seemed no time at all before the little man was sitting on a rusty iron chair beside the darkening lake, speaking as though to his fingers.

"I am Joseph Lessing," he said in the same apologetic tone. "If you have not heard of me, I don't suppose you will have heard of my stepfather. But at one time he was rather famous as an eye, ear and throat specialist. Dr. Harvey Lessing, his name was."

"In those days we—I mean the family—always came down here to spend our summer holidays. It is rather difficult to make biographical details clear. Perhaps I had better do it with dates as though the matter were really important, like a history book. There were four children. Three of them were Dr. Lessing's."

children by his first wife, who died in 1899 I was the step-son He married my mother when I was 17, in 1901 I regret to say that *she* died three years later Dr Lessing was a kindly man, but he was very unfortunate in the choice of his wives "

The little man appeared to be smiling sadly

"We were an ordinary, contented and happy group, in spite of Brownrigg's cynicism Brownrigg was the eldest Eye, ear and throat pursued us he was a dentist I think he is dead now He was a stout man, smiling a good deal, and his face had a shine like pale butter He was an athlete run to seed, he used to claim that he could draw teeth with his fingers By the way, he was very fond of walnuts I always seem to remember him sitting between two silver candlesticks at the table, smiling, with a heap of shells in front of him and a little sharp nut-pick in his hand

"Harvey Junior was the next They were right to call him Junior, he was of the striding sort, brisk and high-coloured and likeable He never sat down in a chair without first turning it the wrong way round He always said "Ho, my lads!" when he came into a room, and he never went out of it without leaving the door open so that he could come back in again Above everything, he was nearly always on the water We had a skiff and a punt for our little lake—would you believe that it is ten feet deep? Junior always dressed for the part as solemnly as though he had been on the Thames, wearing a red-and-white striped blazer and a straw hat of the sort that used to be called a boater I say he was nearly always on the water but not, of course, after tea That was when Dr Lessing went to take his afternoon nap in the summer-house "

The summer-house, in its sheath of vines, was almost invisible now But they all looked at it, very suggestive in the middle of the lake

"The third child was the girl, Martha She was almost my own age, and I was very fond of her "

Joseph Lessing pressed his hands together

"I am not going to introduce an unnecessary love story, gentlemen," he said "As a matter of fact, Martha was engaged to a young man who had a commission in a line regiment, and she was expecting him down here any day when—the things happened Arthur Somers, his name was I knew him well, I was his confidant in the family

"I want to emphasise what a hot, pleasant summer it was The place looked then much as it does now, except that I think it was greener then I was glad to get away from the city In accordance with Dr Lessing's passion for 'useful employment,' I had been put to work in the optical department of a jeweller's I was always skilful with my hands I dare say I was a spindly, snappish, sus-

picious lad, but they were all very good to me after my mother died except butter-faced Brownrigg, perhaps. But for me that summer centres round Martha, with her brown hair piled up on the top of her head, in a white dress with puffed shoulders, playing croquet on a green lawn and laughing. I told you it was a long while ago.

"On the afternoon of the fifteenth of August we had all intended to be out. Even Brownrigg had intended to go out after a sort of lunch-tea that we had at two o'clock in the afternoon. Look to your right, gentlemen. You see that bow window in the middle of the house, overhanging the lake? There was where the table was set.

"Dr. Lessing was the first to leave the table. He was going out early for his nap in the summer-house. It was a very hot afternoon, as drowsy as the sound of a lawn-mower. The sun baked the old bricks and made a flat blaze on the water. Junior had knocked together a sort of miniature landing-stage at the side of the lake—it was just about where we are sitting now—and the punt and the rowing-boat were lying there.

"From the open windows we could all see Dr. Lessing going down to the landing-stage with the sun on his bald spot. He had a pillow in one hand and a book in the other. He took the rowing-boat, he could never manage the punt properly, and it irritated a man of his dignity to try.

"Martha was the next to leave. She laughed and ran away, as she always did. Then Junior said, 'Cheerio, chaps'—or whatever the expression was then—and strode out leaving the door open. I went shortly afterwards. Junior had asked Brownrigg whether he intended to go out, and Brownrigg had said yes. But he remained, being lazy, with a pile of walnut shells in front of him. Though he moved back from the table to get out of the glare, he lounged there all afternoon in view of the lake.

"Of course, what Brownrigg said or thought might not have been important. But it happened that a gardener named Robinson had taken it into his head to trim some hedges on this side of the house. He had a full view of the lake. And all that afternoon nothing stirred. The summer-house, as you can see, has two doors. one facing towards the house, the other in the opposite direction. These openings were closed by sun-blinds, striped red and white like Junior's blazer, so that you could not see inside. But all the afternoon the summer-house remained dead, showing up against the fiery water and that clump of trees at the far side of the lake. No boat put out. No one went to swim. There was not so much as a ripple, any more than might have been caused by the swans (we had two of them), or by the spring that fed the lake.

"By six o'clock we were all back in the house. When there

began to be a few shadows, I think something in the *emptiness* of the afternoon alarmed us. Dr Lessing should have been there, demanding something. He was not there. We halloo'd for him, but he did not answer. The rowing boat remained tied up by the summer-house. Then Brownrigg, in his cool fetch-and-run fashion, told me to go out and wake up the old party. I pointed out that there was only the punt, and that I was a rotten hand at punting, and that whenever I tried it I only went round in circles or upset the boat. But Junior said, 'Come-along-old-chap-you-shall-improve-your-punting-I'll-give-you-a-hand.'

"I have never forgotten how long it took us to get out there, while I staggered at the punt-pole, and Junior lent a hand."

"Dr Lessing lay easily on his left side, almost on his stomach, on a long wicker settee. His face was very nearly into the pillow, so that you could not see much except a wisp of sandy side-whisker. His right hand hung down to the floor, the fingers trailing into the pages of '*Three Men in a Boat*'."

"We first noticed that there seemed to be some—that is, something that had come out of his ear. More we did not know, except that he was dead, and in fact the weapon has never been found. He died in his sleep. The doctor later told us that the wound had been made by some round sharp-pointed instrument, thicker than a hat-pin but not so thick as a lead-pencil, which had been driven through the right ear into the brain."

Joseph Lessing paused. A mighty swish of wind uprose in the trees beyond the lake, and their tops ruffled under clear starlight. The little man sat nodding to himself in the iron chair. They could see his white hat move.

"Yes?" prompted Dr Fell in an almost casual tone. Dr Fell was sitting back, a great bandit-shape in cloak and shovel-hat. He seemed to be blinking curiously at Lessing over his eyeglasses. "And whom did they suspect?"

"They suspected me," said the little man.

"You see," he went on, in the same apologetic tone, "I was the only one in the group who could swim. It was my one accomplishment. It is too dark to show you now, but I won a little medal by it, and I have kept it on my watch-chain ever since I received it as a boy."

"But you said," cried Hadley, "that nobody——"

"I will explain," said the other, "if you do not interrupt me. Of course, the police believed that the motive must have been money. Dr Lessing was a wealthy man, and his money was divided almost equally among us. I told you he was always very good to me."

"First they tried to find out where every one had been in the afternoon. Brownrigg had been sitting, or said he had been sitting,

in the dining-room. But there was the gardener to prove that not he or any one else had gone out on the lake. Martha (it was foolish, of course, but they investigated even Martha) had been with a friend of hers—I forget her name now—who came for her in the phaeton and took her away to play croquet. Junior had no alibi, since he had been for a country walk. “But,” said Lessing, quite simply, “everybody knew *he* would never do a thing like that. I was the changeling, or perhaps I mean ugly duckling, and I admit I was an unpleasant, sarcastic lad.

“This is how Inspector Deering thought I had committed the murder. First, he thought, I had made sure everybody would be away from the house that afternoon. Thus, later, when the crime was discovered, it would be assumed by every one that the murderer had simply gone out in the punt and come back again. Everybody knew that I could not possibly manage a punt alone. You see?

“Next, the inspector thought, I had come down to the clump of trees across the lake, in line with the summer-house and the dining-room windows. It is shallow there, and there are reeds. He thought that I had taken off my clothes over a bathing-suit. He thought that I had crept into the water under cover of the reeds, and that I had simply swum out to the summer-house under water.

“Twenty odd yards under water, I admit, are not much to a good swimmer. They thought that Brownrigg could not see me come up out of the water, because the thickness of the summer-house was between. Robinson had a full view of the lake, but he could not see that one part at the back of the summer-house. Nor, on the other hand, could I see them. They thought that I had crawled under the sun-blind with the weapon in the breast of my bathing-suit. Any wetness I might have left would soon be dried by the intense heat. That, I think, was how they believed I had killed the old man who befriended me.”

The little man’s voice grew petulant and dazed.

“I told them I did not do it,” he said with a hopeful air. “Over and over again I told them I did not do it. But I do not think they believed me. That is why for all these years I have wondered—

“It was Brownrigg’s idea. They had me before a sort of family council in the library, as though I had stolen jam. Martha was weeping, but I think she was weeping with plain fear. She never stood up well in a crisis, Martha didn’t; she turned pettish and even looked softer. All the same, it is not pleasant to think of a murderer coming up to you as you doze in the afternoon heat. Junior, the good fellow, attempted to take my side and call for fair play; but I could see the idea in his face. Brownrigg, presided, silkily, and smiled down his nose.

"‘We have either got to believe you killed him,’ Brownrigg said, ‘or believe in the supernatural. Is the lake haunted? No, I think we may safely discard that.’ He pointed his finger at me ‘You damned young snake, you are lazy and you wanted that money.’

"But, you see, I had one very strong hold over them—and I used it. I admit it was unscrupulous, but I was trying to demonstrate my innocence and we are told that the devil must be fought with fire. At mention of his hold, even Brownrigg’s jowls shook. Brownrigg was a dentist, Harvey was studying medicine. What hold? That is the whole point. Nevertheless, it was not what the family thought I had to fear—it was what Inspector Deering thought.

"They did not arrest me yet, because there was not enough evidence, but every night I feared it would come the next day. Those days after the funeral were too warm, and suspicion acted like woollen underwear under the heat. Martha’s tantrums got on even Junior’s nerves. Once I thought Brownrigg was going to hit her. She very badly needed her fiancé, Arthur Somers, but, though he wrote that he might be there any day, he still could not get leave of absence from his colonel.

"And then the lake got more food.

"Look at the house, gentlemen. I wonder if the light is strong enough for you to see it from here? Look at the house—the highest window there—under the gable. You see?"

There was a pause, filled with the tumult of the leaves.

"It’s got bars," said Hadley.

"Yes," assented the little man. "I must describe the room. It is a little square room. It has one door and one window. At the time I speak of, there was no furniture at all in it. The furniture had been taken out some years before, because it was rather a special kind of furniture. Since then it had been locked up. The key was kept in a box in Dr. Lessing’s room, but, of course, nobody ever went up there. One of Dr. Lessing’s wives had died there, in a certain condition. I told you he had bad luck with his wives. They had not even dared to have a glass window."

Sharply, the little man struck a match. The brief flame seemed to bring his face up towards them out of the dark. They saw that he had a pipe in his left hand. But the flame showed little except the gentle upward turn of his eyes, and the fact that his whitish hair (of such coarse texture that it seemed whitewashed) was worn rather long.

"On the afternoon of the twenty-second of August, we had an unexpected visit from the family solicitor. There was no one to receive him except myself. Brownrigg had locked himself up in his room at the front with a bottle of whisky, he was drunk, or

said he was drunk Junior was out We had been trying to occupy, our minds for the past week, but Junior could not have his boating or I my workshop this was thought not decent I believe it was thought that the most decent thing was to get drunk For some days Martha had been ailing She was not ill enough to go to bed, but she was lying on a long chair in her bedroom

"I looked into the room just before I went downstairs to see the solicitor The room was muffled up with shutters and velvet curtains, as all the rooms decently were You may imagine that it was very hot in there Martha was lying back in the chair with a smelling-bottle, and there was a white-globed lamp burning on a little round table beside her I remember that her white dress looked starchy; her hair was piled up on top of her head and she wore a little gold watch on her breast Also, her eyelids were so puffed that they seemed almost oriental When I asked her how she was, she began to cry and concluded by throwing a book at me

"So I went on downstairs I was talking to the solicitor when it took place We were in the library, which is at the front of the house, and in consequence we could not hear distinctly But we heard something That was why we went upstairs—and even the solicitor ran Martha was not in her own bedroom We found out where she was from the fact that the door to the garret-stairs was open

"It was even more intolerably hot up under the roof The door to the barred room stood half-way open Just outside stood a housemaid (her name, I think, was Jane Dawson) leaning against the jamb and shaking like the ribbons on her cap All sound had dried up in her throat, but she pointed inside

"I told you it was a little, bare, dirty brown room The low sun made a blaze through the window, and made shadows of the bars across Martha's white dress Martha lay nearly in the middle of the room, with her heel twisted under her as though she had turned round before she fell I lifted her up and tried to talk to her, but a rounded sharp-pointed thing, somewhat thicker than a hatpin, had been driven through the right eye into the brain

"Yet there was nobody else in the room

"The maid told a straight story She had seen Martha come out of Dr. Lessing's bedroom downstairs Martha was running, running as well as she could in those skirts, once she stumbled, and the maid thought that she was sobbing Jane Dawson said that Martha made for the garret door as though the devil were after her Jane Dawson, wishing anything rather than to be alone in the dark hall, followed her She saw Martha come up here and unlock the door of the little brown room When Martha ran

inside, the maid thought that she did not attempt to close the door, but that it appeared to swing shut after her. You see?

"Whatever had frightened Martha, Jane Dawson did not dare follow her in—for a few seconds, at least, and afterwards it was too late. The maid could never afterwards describe exactly the sort of sound Martha made. It was something that startled the birds out of the vines and set the swans flapping on the lake. But the maid presently saw straight enough to push the door with one finger and peep round the edge.

"Except for Martha, the room was empty.

"Hence the three of us now looked at each other. The maid's story was not to be shaken in any way, and we all knew she was a truthful witness. Even the police did not doubt her. She said she had seen Martha go into that room, but that she had seen nobody come out of it. She never took her eyes off the door—it was not likely that she would. But when she peeped in to see what had happened, there was nobody except Martha in the room. That was easily established, because there was no place where any one could have been. Could she have been blinded by the light? No. Could any one have slipped past her? No. She almost shook her hair loose by her vehemence on this point.

"The window, I need scarcely tell you, was inaccessible. Its bars were firmly set, no farther apart than the breadth of your hand, and in any case the window could not have been reached. There was no way out of the room except the door or the window, and no—what is the word I want?—no mechanical device in it. Our friend Inspector Deering made certain of that. One thing I suppose I should mention. Despite the condition of the walls and ceiling, the floor of the room was swept clean. Martha's white dress with the puffed shoulders had scarcely any dirt when she lay there, it was as white as her face.

"This murder was incredible. I do not mean merely that it was incredible with regard to its physical circumstances, but also that there was Martha dead—on a holiday. Possibly she seemed all the more dead because we had never known her well when she was alive. She was (to me, at least) a laugh, a few coquetties, a pair of brown eyes. You felt her absence more than you would have felt that of a more vital person. And—on a holiday, with that warm sun, and the tennis-net ready to be put up.

"That evening I walked with Junior here in the dusk by the lake. He was trying to express some of this. He appeared dazed. He did not know why Martha had gone up to that little brown room, and he kept endlessly asking why. He could not even seem to accustom himself to the idea that our holidays were interrupted, much less interrupted by the murders of his father and his sister.

"There was a reddish light on the lake, the trees stood up against

it like black lace, and we were walking near that clump by the reeds. The thing I remember most vividly is Junior's face. He had his hat on the back of his head, as he usually did. He was staring down past the reeds, where the water lapped faintly, as though the lake itself were the evil genius and kept its secrets. When he spoke I hardly recognised his voice.

"'God,' he said, 'but it's in the air!'

"There was something white floating by the reeds, very slowly turning round, with a snaky discoloured talon coming out from it along the water. The talon was the head of a swan, and the swan was dead of a gash across the neck that had very nearly severed it.

"We fished it out with a boathook," explained the little man, as though with an afterthought. And then he was silent.

On the long iron bench Dr Fell's cape shifted a little, Hadley could hear him wheezing with quiet anger, like a boiling kettle.

"I thought so," rumbled Dr Fell. He added more sharply "Look here, this tomfoolery has got to stop."

"I beg your pardon?" said Joseph Lessing, evidently startled.

"With your kind permission," said Dr Fell, and Hadley has later said that he was never more glad to see that cane flourish or hear that common-sense voice grow fiery with controversy. "With your kind permission, I should like to ask you a question. Will you swear to me by anything you hold sacred (if you have anything, which I rather doubt) that you do not know the real answer?"

"Yes," replied the other seriously, and nodded.

For a little space Dr Fell was silent. Then he spoke argumentatively. "I will ask you another question, then. Did you ever shoot an arrow into the air?"

Hadley turned round. "I hear the call of mumbo-jumbo," said Hadley with grim feeling. "Hold on, now! You don't think that girl was killed by somebody shooting an arrow into the air, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Dr Fell in a more meditative tone. He looked at Lessing. "I mean it figuratively—like the boy in the verse. Did you ever throw a stone when you were a boy? Did you ever throw a stone, not to hit anything, but for the sheer joy of firing it? Did you ever climb trees? Did you ever like to play pirate and dress up and wave a sword? I don't think so. That's why you live in a dreary, rarefied light, that's why you dislike romance and sentiment and good whisky and all the noblest things of this world, and it is also why you do not see the unreasonableness of several things in this case.

"To begin with, birds do not commonly rise up in a great cloud from the vines because some one cries out. With the hopping and

always-whooping Junior about the premises, I should imagine the birds were used to it. Still less do swans leap up out of the water and flap their wings because of a cry from far away, swans are not so sensitive. But did you ever see a boy throw a stone at a wall? Did you ever see a boy throw a stone at the water? Birds and swans would have been outraged only if something had *struck* both the wall and the water—something, in short, which fell from that barred window.

"Now, frightened women do not in their terror rush up to a garret, especially a garret with such associations. They go downstairs, where there is protection. Martha Lessing was not frightened. She went up to that room for some purpose. What purpose? She could not have been going to get anything, for there was nothing in the room to be got. What could have been on her mind? The only thing we know to have been on her mind was a frantic wish for her fiancé to get there. She had been expecting him for weeks. It is a singular thing about that room—but its window is the highest in the house, and commands the only good clear view of the road to the village.

"Now suppose some one had told her that he thought, he rather *thought*, he had glimpsed Arthur Somers coming up the road from the village. It was a long way off, of course, and the some one admitted he might have been mistaken in thinking so.

"H'm, yes. The trap was all set, you see. Martha Lessing waited only long enough to get the key out of the box in her father's room, and she sobbed with relief. But, when she got to the room, there was a strong sun pouring through the bars straight into her face—and the road to the village is a long way off. That, I believe, was the trap. For on the window-ledge of that room (which nobody ever used, and which some one has swept so that there shall be no footprints) this some one has conveniently placed a pair of—eh, Hadley?"

"Field-glasses," said Hadley, and got up in the gloom.

"Still," argued Dr. Fell, wheezing argumentatively, "there would be one nuisance. Take a pair of field-glasses, and try to use them in a window where the bars are set more closely than the breadth of your hand. The bars get in the way—wherever you turn you bump into them, they confuse sight and irritate you, and, in addition, there is a strong sun to complicate matters. In your impatience, I think you would turn the glasses sideways and pass them out through the bars. Then, holding them firmly against one bar with your hands through the bars on either side, you would look through the eyepieces.

"But," said Dr. Fell, with a ferocious geniality, "these were no ordinary glasses. Martha Lessing had noticed before that the lenses were blurred. Now that they were in position, she tried

to adjust the focus by turning the little wheel in the middle. And as she turned the wheel, like the trigger of a pistol it released the spring mechanism and a sharp steel point shot out from the right-hand lens into her eye. She dropped the glasses, which were outside the window. The weight of them tore the point from her eye, and it was this object, falling, which gashed and broke the neck of the swan just before it disappeared into the water below."

He paused. He had taken out a cigar, but he did not light it. "Busy solicitors do not usually come to a house 'unexpectedly'. They are summoned. Brownrigg was drunk and Junior absent, there was no one at the back of the house to see the glasses fall. For this time the murderer had to have a respectable alibi. Young Martha, the only one who could have been gulled into such a trap, had to be sacrificed—to avert the arrest which had been threatening some one ever since the police found out how Dr Lessing really had been murdered."

"There was only one man who admittedly did speak with Martha Lessing only a few minutes before she was murdered. There was only one man who was employed as optician at a jeweller's, and admits he had his 'workshop' here. There was only one man skilful enough with his hands——" Dr Fell paused, wheezing, and turned to Lessing. "I wonder they didn't arrest you."

"They did," said the little man, nodding. "You see, I was released from Broadmoor only a month ago."

There was a sudden rasp and crackle as he struck another match. The tiny flame curled up, and, as he held it out politely for Dr Fell's cigar, they saw that the ascetic face wore a gentle smile against the dark.

"You——" bellowed Hadley, and stopped. "So it was your mother who died in that room? Then what the hell do you mean by keeping us here with this pack of nightmares?"

"No," said the other peevishly, and with a sort of pounce. He seemed distressed. "No, no, no, no! That's what you don't understand. I never wanted to know who killed Dr Lessing or poor Martha. You have got hold of the wrong problem. And yet I tried to tell you what the problem was."

"You see, it was not *my* mother who died mad. It was theirs—Brownrigg's and Harvey's and Martha's. That was why they were so desperately anxious to think I was guilty, for they could not face the alternative. Didn't I tell you I had a hold over them, a hold that made even Brownrigg shake, and that I used it? Do you think they wouldn't have had me clapped into gaol straight-away if it had been *my* mother who was mad? Eh?"

"Of course," he explained apologetically, "at the trial they had to swear it was *my* mother who was mad, for I threatened to

tell the truth in open court if they didn't. Otherwise I should have been hanged, you see. Only Brownrigg and Junior were left. Brownrigg was a dentist, Junior was to be a doctor, and if it had been known—— But that is not the point. That is not the problem. Their mother was mad, but they were harmless. I killed Dr. Lessing. I killed Martha. Yet I am quite sane. Why did I do it, all those years ago? Why? Is there no rational pattern in the scheme of things, and no answer to the bedevilled of the earth?"

The match curled to a red ember, winked and went out. Clearest of all they remembered the coarse hair that was like whitewash on the black, the eyes, and the curiously suggestive hands. Then Joseph Lessing got up from the chair. The last they saw of him was his white hat bobbing and flickering across the lawn under the blowing trees.

Mrs Bradley

THE CASE OF THE HUNDRED CATS

By

GLADYS MITCHELL

FROM the very first I myself suspected the aunt. We had been asked to see a patient who suffered from periodic loss of memory, but Mrs Bradley—who was carrying out a delicate Home Office job at the time—was not prepared to undertake the case, so I thought I would ring up John.

"Is that the house where they keep all those cats?" he asked.

"I don't know, John."

"Well, it is. That woman takes drugs."

"You won't accept the case, then?"

"No, I won't. They called me in last month, and I told them then what I thought. Mrs. What's it is trying to get the other one's money. She'll get her certified if she possibly can."

I wrote to Mrs. Dudley, the woman who had sent me the letter, and told her to bring the patient to see me.

The two of them came next day, a woman of fifty or so, in very sombre clothes, with a heavy face purple with powder and too much eye shadow on, and a frail, anæmic-looking younger woman who seemed too timid even to give her name.

Ethel let them in to the consulting room, and I sat behind the largest of the three desks, fountain pen in hand, and horn-rimmed goggles on nose, and tried not to look like the prettiest secretary in London.

"Mrs. and Miss Dudley?" I asked, making rapid hieroglyphics on a pad.

"Mrs. and Miss Dudley. Yes, that's right," the elder lady said.

"Then, may I see Miss Dudley alone?"

"No, no!" said the girl, in a whining voice. "I had really rather you didn't!"

"You see, I'm afraid you're not quite clear——" said the aunt.

I looked from one to the other.

"It is customary for the patients themselves to describe to me their symptoms. In this way I can tell whether the case is of sufficient importance for Mrs. Bradley to handle," I said with exceptional rudeness. I disliked Mrs. Dudley at sight, and as for

the niece, I never saw any one who made me feel more irritable. "Then do I understand—oh, then you are not Mrs Bradley?" the elder lady said.

"I'm the secretary. It is my duty to keep Mrs Bradley's engagement book up to date. If I think there is no case of sufficient importance for her I send the patients elsewhere—to Sir John MacGovern, for example. But, of course, I can't tell anything about the case until I have questioned the patient alone," I added, turning to the younger woman again.

I saw them look at each other—just a flash, but unmistakable when you're looking out for such a response. The elder woman cleared her throat a little. People often dislike me—I am too pretty and too efficient, I suppose. The first antagonises women, the second men. It is unfortunate for me, in a way.

The elder woman rose.

"Very well. I suppose you mean you want to question us separately. Where shall I wait?"

I rang for Ethel to show her into the lounge. It was eleven o'clock. Ethel, I knew, would settle her down in the lounge and bring her sweet biscuits and coffee, and perhaps a Turkish cigarette, thus producing, as exactly as possible, the psychological effects of the lounge of one of the big London stores, where women of this type seem to spend their time. Besides, these would keep her occupied whilst I questioned the patient, and, even if she wondered all the time what was being asked and answered, experience had informed us that her wondering would be of a comparatively charitable kind.

As soon as she had gone I settled down to it.

"Do you want to come to Mrs Bradley for some treatment?" I enquired. The patient looked at me with her large, weak, silly, blue eyes, and nodded.

"Is that the truth? Or did your aunt bring you here against your will?" I said. It was a pretty direct suggestion, but she ignored it.

"I wanted to come. I am very ill. I think I am going to die," the poor foolish creature observed, in the same thin, wailing voice as she had used when her aunt was in the room.

"You take drugs, don't you?" I said, remembering what John had told me over the telephone.

"Sometimes. When the cats get very bad."

"The cats?"

"I do love them. They are dears. But they scratch me sometimes. Look!" She glanced fearfully round at the door, then showed me her neck and shoulder, pulling the blouse away with such nervous fingers that one of the buttons flew off.

"I must sew that on before auntie sees it," she said.

We both went down on our knees in search of it, and when it was found she stuffed it into the pocket of her suit, beneath a handkerchief

"I'm scratched all over," she said

"But all these scratches are dangerous! How many cats have you got?"

"A hundred, and I love them all," she said. The bending about had brought colour into her cheeks, and she looked a good deal prettier

"A hundred?" I said. "And when you lose your memory, do you forget the cats?"

"No, never. I always remember the cats. At least, the cats are the last things I think about when I lose my memory, and the first things I think about when it comes back to me."

"Do you wander away from your home?"

"Oh, yes. They find me usually at the Zoo."

"At the Zoo? What makes you go there?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I'm always looking at birds when I go to the Zoo. I believe I think I'm a cat."

She was gaining much more confidence. She was leaning forward a little, absorbed in what she was saying. "You see," she added, "I really live two lives."

"Most people live more than two lives. They live six or seven," I assured her.

At Adelheim, where I was trained, they always insisted that we must adopt a brisk and businesslike cheerfulness with the patients.

But this patient, who had begun to creep out of her shell, instantly drew back again, and, for a bit, would not answer my questions at all, except with a nervous laugh.

"What do you want Mrs. Bradley to do? Do you know?" I demanded.

"I only want her to write a certificate, and send a copy of it to my banker, to say I am perfectly sane," the poor girl replied, with a sudden return to composure which took my breath away.

"But who on earth thinks you are anything else?" I said, as though in great surprise. As a matter of fact, most of these under-developed, hysterical subjects *do* think that some one believes them to be insane.

She shrugged. Then she got up abruptly.

"You'll ask her to see me, won't you? Before I lose my memory again? Mrs. Bradley, I mean. You'll get her to see me, won't you? When auntie isn't there. Like this. Like this."

"I'll ask her," I answered. (Whether she'll come is another matter, I thought.) "Yes, I'll certainly ask her. Do you know—"

have you any idea—what brings on these lapses of memory? Does your aunt—do you quarrel at all?”

“Quarrel? One doesn’t—quarrel with grown-up people”

I was annoyed

“How old are you then, Miss Dudley?”

“Miss Dudley! How funny that sounds? They always call me Lily That’s what you’ll put on the certificate for me, won’t you? Lily Dudley is sane”

She went out, looking at me over her shoulder with those great, pale, silly, blue eyes

I telephoned Mrs Bradley, and she told me to call at her Kensington house and have tea She was fairly late getting in, so we made it dinner, instead, and I wore my new pansy-black Mrs Bradley eyed it approvingly

“And what supreme idiocy have you committed this time, child?” said she

I told her about the case She grinned, looking just like an alligator

“I must attend another sitting of this Lunacy Laws Commission thing to-morrow, but on Thursday I could see these Dudleys,” she said “Make the appointment for three in the afternoon, at their private house I like to know the environment of these loss of memory cases And I want to see the letter You have it, haven’t you, child?”

I took it out of my handbag, and passed it across the table

“Aha!” said Mrs Bradley In her sea-green dinner gown and with her yellow skin, she looked like a smiling snake I watched her, fascinated, as she took the letter in her skinny claw and with horrible cackles read it

“Treasure it, child,” she said “You had better come with me on Thursday Now go and ring up our friend, Inspector Toogarde, and tell him to keep a watch on the house If he can find any manner or means of excuse, he’s to see that the young woman is arrested The sooner that’s done, the better”

“The *young* woman? Oh—to keep her safe from the aunt!” We had never before employed protective arrest in a case, but I had heard of it

“To keep her safe from the aunt,” said Mrs Bradley She cackled wildly She took me to the theatre after dinner and we picked up John in the vestibule

“What’s this about these cats?” asked Mrs Bradley

“Cats?” said John “Oh, did Nancy tell you? Cats Oh, yes” He stampeded us into our stalls and then studied the programme Mrs Bradley gave him a dig in the ribs

“And you’d better write to Mrs Dudley, and tell her my fee is payable in advance,” she said to me

"Very well, if you wish it," I said

"I'm listening," John remarked, caressing his lower ribs

"Tell me about the cats, child The curtain goes up, or should do, in ten minutes' time"

"Well, just that they keep cats, you know The whole place swarms with cats And the stink! Phew! Awful! And yet, a funny thing" He paused, a habit he has

"Go on!" we said together

"Mixed with this awful catty stench, which pervades the whole of the house, there was a faint odour of sanctity, so to speak, which seemed just vaguely familiar," said John, caressing his chin

"Proceed," said Mrs Bradley

"Oh, I don't know I could have placed it but for the all-pervasive stench of those beastly cats I connect it with that American show we visited last year You know the place I mean"

Mrs Bradley's eyes were snapping

"Go on, child, do," she said

"I can't Don't know any more I knew the woman was taking drugs I said so Gave her to understand I'd put the police on her track"

"And what stuff do you think it was? Cocaine?" I demanded, abruptly. We had never had a dope-fiend on our books

John laughed

"It wasn't cocaine"

"What do you know about poisons, John?" asked Mrs Bradley, suddenly.

"Nothing, beyond what all alienists learn in a routine way for rapid diagnosis or morbid symptoms, of course"

"Interesting," said Mrs Bradley absently, "I wish I could cut that conference to-morrow But I can't I'm down to speak Let me beg of you, child," she said to me, "on no account to go round to that house alone"

I promised, and the curtain went up just then During the intervals Mrs Bradley would not discuss the case, but bought us pink gins and made weird hieroglyphics all over her programme while we stood in the bar and drank them

"Keep me in touch with any developments, child," she said that night, before we parted John took me out to supper It was an extension night We danced a good deal, and I was so tired that Ethel had to wake me in the morning

"I brought your early tea, miss, nearly an hour ago, but you was off that sound!" she said "So now I've brought your breakfast, and here's the letters, miss"

So I breakfasted in bed, and read Mrs Dudley's second letter. They were going away to Broadstairs, it announced, and if I would write the certificate which had been asked for—they understood

from the medical directory that I was entirely qualified to do this—they need not trouble us further. The letter bore the postmark of ten p m, and was headed, "Nine forty-five."

I rang up Mrs Bradley at her house. The conference began at eleven, so I knew she would still be at home.

"Telephone Inspector Toogarde and tell him to watch the house. I *wish* he'd arrest the niece, tell him," said Mrs Bradley.

Next day I called for her and we both went round to what Americans would call the Dudley residence. It was an old house with a basement.

"Well, any developments, Albert?" asked Mrs Bradley, for the inspector had put a man outside the door.

"No, ma'am." He saluted.

"Not even a light in the basement?" asked Mrs Bradley. The constable looked puzzled.

"Yes. There *was* a light in the basement. I never thought anything of it. There wasn't no noise," he observed.

"Oh, wasn't there?" said Mrs Bradley briskly. "When your officer comes along, you'd better tell him to go down and dig for the body."

She went up to the door and knocked. There was silence. Then there came the sound of footsteps, and, at the same time, a kind of rushing noise. Mrs Bradley pulled me aside so that both of us were pressed against the coping at the top of the short flight of steps.

"Lean back as far as you can. Here come the cats," she said. As soon as the door was opened, out they came—Siamese, Persian, tabby, Manx, males and females—one animal, I am certain, was a lynx, and I'm sure I saw a Scottish wild-cat, but they all shot past so quickly that it was impossible almost to see them. Then a whining voice said sadly:

"Oh, dear! That's all auntie's cats."

"*Your* cats, you mean," said Mrs Bradley sharply. She put out a yellow claw, seized the woman by the wrist and stared down at the writhing fingers.

"Albert, child, do you want your promotion?" she called. The prisoner bent her head towards Mrs Bradley's wrist.

"Not 'arf ma'am, please," said the policeman grinning. He swung up the steps and grabbed Mrs Bradley's captive, who was fighting and clawing, more like a cat herself than a human being.

"Quiet, will you?" demanded the constable. The prisoner began to cry. "And what shall I charge her with, ma'am?—assault and battery, or is it an R S P C A case with all them cats?"

"Charge her with murder, and see how she likes it," said Mrs Bradley brutally. And sure enough, it was not much later that she and John were watching Inspector Toogarde taking the body

up from under the basement floor Mrs Bradley sighed when she saw me again

"It's a pity I had that conference yesterday Still, Toogarde has got his prisoner, and I expect that's all he'll care "

"But did that spineless creature *really* murder her aunt?" I could not believe it possible

Mrs Bradley looked at her yellow wrist where teeth-marks were plainly visible She did not answer the question There was no need

"There were one or two interesting points about the story you told me," she said, "although I don't think you noticed The first thing that struck me was that evidently you had taken it for granted that the older woman must be the married woman This was not necessarily true Then came the extraordinary contrast between the way the younger woman spoke when something important was on hand, and her remarks when the matter under discussion was not germane to her purpose "

"Oh? Do you mean the lucid way she told me her aunt was going to get her certified, and wanted me to testify she was sane?" I began to see the point of that interview now

"It was when you told me she wanted you to send a copy of the certificate to her banker, that I became so extremely suspicious," said Mrs Bradley "It so happens that one of the most unpleasant experiences of my life was when I helped to certify a perfectly sane man on the evidence of relatives who wanted to administer his estate Luckily, we put that right in time, but since then, as soon as I hear lunacy and bankers mentioned together, all my suspicions are aroused In this particular case, for instance, if Miss Dudley were the older woman and Mrs Dudley the younger, why didn't the younger one undeceive you?"

"Well, why didn't the older one? It was equally apparent to her "

"I fancy, if you refer to your notes of the conversation, that she did attempt to put you right on the point, but that you yourself interrupted her, and then you sent her away Well, the whole thing sounded, to my possibly morbid mind, just sufficiently extraordinary to warrant my interference But I think the affair was well on its way by the time they came to you here Of course, it was the *aunt* who took drugs, I knew that from your description of her face It was the niece who procured enough of the valerian for murder "

"Valerian?"

"Cats," said Mrs Bradley succinctly "It was when John mentioned the cats and their smell and then the other smell which he almost thought he could recognise, that I began to smell, not a rat, but a murder You see, in that American hospital he mentioned,

they gave the patients small doses of valerian as a sedative. They stain the stuff pink there, and slightly flavour it with essence of clove. It was the clove, I dare say, that he smelt."

"But I still don't understand about the certificate."

"Miss Dudley, the older lady, the aunt by marriage, had made a will in niece Mrs Dudley's favour. The latter wanted Miss Dudley—Lily Dudley—certified sane, so that, *whatever* happened later, the will remained valid and no other relatives could plead unsound mind in the testatrix, because of our medical and psycho-analytical evidence."

"But how do you *know* that the young one was Mrs Dudley? The thing seems to turn upon that."

"When I grasped her hand at the door, I looked for the mark of the wedding ring, child. It was there."

Hildegarde Withers

THE RIDDLE OF THE JACK OF DIAMONDS

By

STUART PALMER

THE doorbell shrilled for a long minute, and then followed impetuous pounding of small hard fists upon the door of Miss Hildegarde Withers' modest little west side apartment. The middle-aged school teacher sat up suddenly in bed. By the pale grey light which filtered through her windows she saw that her alarm clock, set for eight, would not ring for another hour.

"Whatever in the world——"

Drowsily she found her slippers and dressing-gown, and swung open the door. It was a girl in her middle twenties, beautiful in a coldly perfect manner, and dressed in a soft coat which more than a hundred brown mink had died to make possible. Yet the dark hair was a little disarranged—the arrogant mouth frightened beneath its subtle smears of rouge.

The dark eyes flashed, without hesitancy. "You are Miss Withers? The one I've read about? I'm in terrible trouble!"

The school teacher swung the door wider, and offered her best chair to this perfumed and exquisite visitor. The slender gloved hands gripped together. "You will—you must help me!"

"I'm Lorna Davies—Lorna *Gault* Davies," said the young woman, as if that explained everything. She hesitated, and then plunged on. "It's about Rich—Richie Davies, my husband. They've arrested him. The police, you know. He's just an unworldly artist, and heaven knows what they'll make him do or say. It was all because the man who has an apartment on the floor above us was—died last night. A man named Merlin—Jack Merlin." She leaned forward, and the mink coat opened to show that she was still wearing an evening gown daringly designed of white satin. "Richie didn't have anything to do with it, of course. But he's got himself terribly involved. He works late at night at his painting, and last night or rather this morning he went out for a walk. When he came back the elevator boy made a silly mistake and took him to the ninth floor instead of the eighth. Richie never noticed—the apartments are similarly located, and he found the door of Merlin's apartment open and walked in thinking he was home."

"Then——" Lorna was staring at Miss Withers' slipper—"then he noticed that there was a dead body in front of the fireplace. He rushed out to call for help, and some people got out of the elevator and saw him. When the police got there they arrested Richie. They wouldn't believe his story, and of course the elevator boy swore up and down that he *hadn't* made such a mistake."

"Of course!" agreed Miss Withers. She was growing interested.

"So you see? It's all a mistake, but Richie musn't stay in jail. If you'll only explain to the police!"

Miss Withers was thoughtful. "If what you say is true, your husband has nothing much to worry about. But I'll take the case. Only understand this, young woman. My aim will be not to protect any one person, but simply to find out the truth—and let the chips fall where they may."

Lorna Davies hesitated only a moment. "Of course! That's what I want."

"I'd better go down there," Miss Withers decided. "Where did it happen?"

"Saxton Arms—35 Park Avenue. I've my car here, but I can't wait while you dress. I must see some people before nine o'clock." She grasped Miss Withers' hand, in a clasp that was surprisingly firm. "I'm trusting you—take care of Richie——" She was gone.

Miss Withers frowned as she hastily dressed. She could understand why the young woman had other errands—there would be lawyers to see and all that—but why before nine o'clock?

A very few minutes later the schoolteacher was inside a taxi-cab and hurtling through the almost deserted streets of Manhattan. She was breathlessly deposited before one of the better apartment houses of lower Park Avenue.

She was trying to wheedle her way past the burly policeman at the door, when a dry voice behind her said "Hullo! Here already?"

"Oscar!"

He took her arm and led her past the humbled guardians of the portal. "Only heard about this job half an hour ago," he remarked accusingly as they headed for the elevator. "Like to know how you got here ahead of me."

She told him, as they swept skyward, the bare facts of Lorna Davies' call. The Inspector looked rather stern. "You'll have a job of it, Hildegard. It looks plenty bad for young Davies."

"But Oscar, coincidences do happen—and elevator boys can make mistakes!"

"Fish can wear water-wings, but they don't. Davies tells a pretty thin story—about his walking in upon Merlin's still-warm

body by accident Besides, he didn't rush out to turn in any alarm He ducked down the stairs to his own apartment, and only the fact that some homeward bound merrymakers recognised him coming out of Merlin's door gave us the lead on him "

They were going down the ninth floor hall "Then who did turn in the alarm?"

"Funny thing, that," admitted the Inspector "The call came from an all-night drug store down the street Man's voice, but wouldn't give his name That was about four o'clock this morning If it was Davies, why didn't he use his own phone?"

Miss Withers followed the Inspector down the hallway to the door of 9A, which was at the moment being propped up by the wide shoulders of Patrolman Doone

"The medical examiner's just left, sir," he told the Inspector

"This may be no sight for a lady," warned Piper But Miss Withers marched stoutly through the door in his wake

The Inspector was quite right This was no sight for a lady Through the open inner door of the wide foyer they could see flashes of blinding white light where the department photographers were taking pictures of the grim thing which lay sprawled face downwards upon the rumpled rug near the big living room fireplace Mentally the schoolteacher checked down one point in favour of Richie Davies story

A sergeant approached bearing a heavy iron poker—part of the set which lay overturned in the empty fireplace "This did it," he announced "Fits the hole in Merlin's skull Not a print on it, either "

The Inspector nodded, and went over to scrutinise the corpse—a fattish, sleek man of perhaps forty or so dressed in a black robe and red silk pajamas Piper thought he had seen that face somewhere before, though certainly not in the Lineup

"What did the doctor say?"

Sergeant Dilling put down the poker "Who, Levin? Nothing much Death instantaneous, and could not have been self-inflicted Probably happened about three o'clock this morning—maybe three-thirty That crack with the poker would have felled an ox, he said "

The Inspector spent the next half hour checking up on what had already been discovered about Jack Merlin and the apartment house Merlin had lived here for two months—since February first Two servants came in by the day—address unknown as yet Entertained largely in the evening, both ladies and gentlemen of undoubted social standing The elevator boys thought that there had been visitors last night, but they couldn't be sure, as Mr Merlin's guests never sent up their names A number of people had been taken up to the ninth floor

At one o'clock, Piper learned, the doorman went off duty, and only one elevator boy remained. Guests had to use their own pass-keys to enter the main door. Piper nodded. Then Davies could have walked down seven flights of stairs, phoned in the alarm from the drug store booth, and returned to his own apartment without being seen, particularly if he chose a time when the elevator boy was taking some one up or down. But why?

Pondering such problems, the Inspector sought his companion, and found her quietly playing solitaire on one side of the big round dining-room table. "Don't disturb me," she told him. "I don't often make Canfield, and it looks as if——"

She played out half a dozen more cards, and then stopped short. "If only I could have turned up the jack of diamonds, I'd have made it." She shook her head, and rose from the table. "Sorry to have kept you, Oscar—but there wasn't much to see in this place." The Inspector frowned, and then shrugged his shoulders.

Idly she lifted the buried card which had kept her from making the game. It was a queen. The jack of diamonds was not in evidence anywhere in the deck.

"Botheration!" said Hildegard Withers. "For a man who keeps as many poker chips in his sideboard as the late Mr. Merlin, you'd have thought he'd have a complete deck of cards." She replaced the deck with the dozen others which rested in a drawer of the sideboard, and meekly followed the Inspector out into the living-room.

The schoolmistress pointed to a heavy brass stand, of the non-tippable variety, which stood in the living-room near the foyer door. "Tell your blood-hounds not to neglect that," she advised.

The Inspector peered into it, and then suddenly went down on his knees. With a pencil from his pocket he proceeded to lift from the mess of ashes and stubs which clogged the tube several torn and twisted bits of paper. Miss Withers watched in silence while he pieced together the fragments of four cheques—amounts varying from fifty to four hundred dollars, all made out to cash, dated this same day, and signed with names straight out of the Social Register. Beneath them was a torn deposit slip for the Merchant's Uptown Bank, signed with the name "John Merlin" and dated to-day. Five cheques were listed—four with amounts varying from fifty to four hundred dollars—and a fifth to the amount of \$2500! There was also a cash entry for six hundred and fifty.

Yet try as they would, the eager detectives did not light upon the missing cheque for the larger amount. Finally they gave up poking among the refuse.

"At least this gives us something to work on," Piper decided finally. Miss Withers sniffed, and led the way toward the door.

"I don't suppose," said Miss Withers casually, "that there's any use looking for the dead man's spectacles"

Piper stopped short "Eh?"

"Of course you noticed that the corpse showed a red mark across the bridge of the nose, where glasses usually rest? Yet I didn't see any glasses"

"Neither did I," admitted Piper He made hurried enquiries "The sergeant didn't see any, either He noticed the red mark, and asked the elevator boys They say Merlin never wore glasses"

"I wonder," said Hildegard Withers "Perhaps we'll find Merlin's spectacles along with the jack of diamonds"

Piper looked at his watch, and saw that it was barely eight "How about some breakfast?" he demanded

The schoolteacher shook her head "Never let a trail get cold," she insisted "Suppose we do a little breaking and entering?"

"If you mean Davies' apartment downstairs, the boys already gave it the once-over when they picked him up"

"Then we'll give it the twice-over," said Hildegard Withers "Perhaps there is some tiny detail which your men overlooked"

With a master-key secured—no doubt illegally—from the building manager, they entered apartment 8A, first ringing long and loud to make sure that Lorna Davies had not returned from her errands Except that the furnishings were of a distinctly Bohemian type, this apartment was a duplicate of the one upstairs—and Richie Davies' thin story was thus somewhat aided

One end of the living-room, near the windows, had been transformed into a studio, and underneath a "daylight" lamp a large easel held an unfinished oil painting which the Inspector admired sardonically It represented a purple triangle in the close embrace of seven orange and gold petzels "Nude Descending a Staircase," Piper decided Miss Withers sniffed Then she leaned past him and touched the bright purple, which came off on a wide smear on her finger She nodded "I thought so!"

They wandered through the high-ceilinged rooms "Plenty of dough," hazarded the Inspector "Must cost a fortune"

"Hmm," Miss Withers interjected "Must *have* cost a fortune, you mean. Notice the mend in the Persian rug, half-hidden by the coffee table? Notice that the curtains are sun-faded? All the same, the kitchen is in splendid order, and so is the bedroom No twin beds here, either Looks like a happy home, Oscar—run on a decreasing budget. Maid by the day, and dinners out"

"You're way ahead of me," protested the Inspector "Now do we have breakfast? There's nothing more to see in this place"

But he was wrong There was something more to see It happened to be Lorna Davies, who spoke softly from the doorway behind them, as she removed her gloves

"Mind if I come in?" she said

"Er——" began the Inspector "We just——"

"I'd love to show you around—some of Richie's paintings are considered quite good," Lorna continued. She placed her gloves and handbag on a table, and lit a cigarette with a steady hand. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting while I slip into something more suitable than evening clothes?" She was still wearing the white satin gown.

"Thank you, my dear, but we only have a moment" said Hildegard Withers. Lorna Davies disappeared in the bedroom.

"Poker-face," observed Piper. "She was sore as—anything at finding us here, but she covered it."

"Eh?" said Miss Withers, startled out of her thoughts. "Poker-face! That's it." She said no more, but as the Inspector busied himself with lighting a cigar, the schoolteacher moved casually toward Lorna Davies' mesh handbag, shielding it from Piper's view. Her hands slid softly forward, and the bag opened without a snap. It was not robbery upon which the meddlesome lady was bent—indeed, exactly the contrary—but when she saw the interior of that handbag she changed her mind. Whatever she had expected to find there, it was not the missing jack of diamonds.

Coolly she pocketed it, and as coolly turned toward the Inspector. "Perhaps we'd better not wait, after all," she said—and they up-toed out.

Downstairs Piper made a phone call. He had promised to be only a moment, but Miss Withers waited for ten minutes. He rejoined her with his cigar cold and dead between his teeth, and she knew at once that something had happened.

"A confession from Davies?" she asked.

"For once you're wrong," said Oscar Piper. "That young man isn't talking, though he seems plenty worried. There's . . ."

"By the way, Oscar," Miss Withers cut in, "do you happen to know how Davies was dressed when they arrested him?"

"Huh? Why, yeah. In a smock and old flannel trousers. The boys who picked him up had to wait while he dressed. Why?"

"Never mind why," he was told. "Now what's the rest of it?"

Piper frowned. "It probably doesn't have anything to do with this case," he began, as they went out of the apartment house, "but they've made a funny discovery down at Centre Street. The fingerprint boys went through the Merlins' apartment a couple of hours ago, and they found nothing. Or rather, they found so many prints that they didn't mean much. All the same, on a silver flask in Merlin's desk they found a print that checks up in our files with that of a gent who's been wanted for a long time . . . a hood who goes by the name of Feets Titus. He's——"

"Aha!" said Hildegard Withers.

"But he's not our man," continued the Inspector "Because fingerprints age as the oil dries out of them, and this print was at least two weeks old No fresh ones of the guy, so he didn't pull the job last night It's not up his alley anyway—Feets is more the type to pull out an automatic or a machine gun and blow his victims to blazes"

"A public enemy, eh? Tell me more," insisted the schoolteacher, as they sat down to breakfast in a drug store on a little side street

"More about Titus? Seattle wants him for homicide—he was driving away from the scene of a racketeer bombing and killed two kids in the street New Orleans for dope running—Chicago for rape and attempted murder—Philadelphia for another hit-and-run gangster car job—" The Inspector patiently went on, from metropolis to metropolis, detailing the list of Feets Titus's escapades "Here we've had him in the Lineup several times, but never pinned anything on him He used to be Arny Rothstein's bodyguard and special messenger, that's how he got the nickname 'Feets' "

The Inspector took a deep swig of his coffee "Of course we'll try to pick him up, but it's like looking for a needle in a haystack"

"It *can* be done—with a magnet," said Hildegard Withers She pushed back her chair, very suddenly "Oscar—arrest Feets Titus!"

"I'll do that—if you'll tell me where he is"

"I've got a good idea," said Hildegard Withers tartly She was thoughtful for another moment "You just told me of the cities in which Mr Titus had gotten himself into trouble—every large city in the United States *except* Boston Gangsters never try to hide out in small towns, and I'll bet you anything you like that Titus is somewhere aboard a train bound for Boston this very minute—it stands to reason!"

The Inspector looked at his watch, and saw that it was half-past nine "You think Titus did the job? If he did, and decided to lam in the way you suggest, he could have got a slow train at six this morning, and a fast one at eight-thirty But—"

"Try it, anyway," begged the schoolteacher "Wire his description ahead—or better still, doesn't the Boston plane leave in time to beat both trains into the city?"

"Wait a minute!" insisted the Inspector "I tell you, there's no reason to suppose that Titus did this job He wouldn't use a poker if he did I'm convinced—"

"So am I," agreed Miss Withers "Oscar, you aren't always as dumb as you are sometimes"—She pushed at him eagerly "Get to the phone and have them hold the plane—it leaves in half an hour, if I remember correctly, from Roosevelt Field"

They slid up into thin air twenty minutes late, but they were

set down again at Boston Airport on schedule. Most of the trip Miss Withers had spent in a close and scientific study of the jack of diamonds which she had abstracted from Lorna Davies' purse, but neither the foolish smiling face of the knave nor the conventional bicycle back of the card told her what she needed to know. Oddly enough, tiny holes had been punched in each corner of the card, as if it had been pinned to a drawing board. It had been pinned there face downward, anyway—the holes showed that much.

"Anyway," Piper said, as they walked into South Station shortly before the slow train was due, "even if this is a wild goose chase, it isn't going to be as bad as if we had got in touch with the Boston police over nothing. We can sneak back home without anybody knowing."

"Can't we?" Miss Withers agreed.

Then the train pulled in. Not more than a dozen passengers had arisen before daylight to make this trip—they straggled toward the gates in an unprepossessing line. First came two boys, bearing paper suitcases—all too evidently arriving homeward after an unsuccessful attempt to find jobs in New York. Then there was a young couple with a baby, a young couple with two babies, a frightened-looking young man with unbrushed hair and big glasses who clutched a violin case against his narrow chest, a faded fat blonde of forty, and a travelling salesman with two sample cases.

The Inspector turned to Miss Withers. "You see? I have seen Feets Titus often enough in the Lineup to know that none of these are him."

"*Is he*," corrected Miss Withers absently. Something bothered her, but she couldn't put her finger on it. She jerked her head. Finger—that was it.

"We may as well wait for the other train—though it'll be the same story," the Inspector said wearily. "Didn't I tell you?"

"Tell me later," she interrupted impolitely, and set off across the vast marble hall at a rapid trot. "Come on, Oscar!"

She raised her voice. "Wait a minute—Yoo hoo."

The little violinist—whose hands were unmusical—stopped in wonderment. Then he darted away like a rabbit, dropping his violin case in his haste. It fell directly in front of Miss Withers, flying open and disgorging wearing apparel in every direction. Her foot struck something hard, and she collapsed in an undignified heap.

The Inspector helped her to her feet. They both looked down and saw that she had tripped over a nasty-looking automatic pistol.

"There he goes!" cried Miss Withers.

A yellow taxi whirled away from the curb. In a moment the

Inspector and Miss Withers were in another, tearing like mad through the sedate streets of Boston

"By heaven, it must be Feets Titus!" Piper roared "Driver—stuck to that car or I'll murder you" The driver clenched his teeth grimly and stuck

Miss Withers clung to a strap and prayed There was nothing else to do A brilliant star with many facets appeared in the windshield as a white face showed itself for a moment in the rear window of the cab ahead and fired At the next corner an officer ran out into the street and stood with his arms outstretched, but leaped aside as the first taxi swooped down on him Along the sidewalks people were running . screaming

Piper spoke to his driver, and their cab slowed When it picked up again, it was loaded with two hundred pounds of bone and brawn on the running board A service pistol cracked, and cracked again, but the bouncing of the cab was too severe for anything but pure shooting luck

The cab ahead swerved "Mother of God—the boy is driving him into a dead end street!" roared the new recruit "He'll get killed for it ."

But nobody got killed for anything The taxi ahead screeched to a stop with its headlights pressed against the low railing of a pier-head, and from its window a gun sailed lazily outward to splash in the water The driver leaped out, hands upraised—for he knew the bad position he was in

Then, as the Inspector and the Boston officer got their feet on the ground and came gingerly forward, the door of the other cab opened and a dapper young man stepped down, his hands busy lighting a cigarette

"So you've got me," he observed politely "So what?"

The Inspector slapped out the cigarette—men had killed themselves that way—and snatched off the big, lightly tinted glasses They were a little large for Feets Titus, but he recognised the petty racketeer well enough now that his hair was combed back

"Titus, you're under arrest for the murder of Jack Merlin," he announced Feets Titus shrugged

"Nice day for it," he observed "Honest, Inspector, this is news to me Poor old Jack—haven't seen him in a week"

"Then you might explain how you happen to be wearing his spectacles," cut in a shrewd and acidulous voice Feets Titus said no more—by advice of counsel, as he put it The Inspector turned to Miss Withers

"That's that," he said "We—you had the right hunch Now, if you'll excuse me for a while, I'll go and arrange for this punk to waive extradition Think we can argue him into it at the station We ought to be able to catch the six o'clock train back"

"You ought to be able," said Miss Withers "I'm not a deputy-sheriff Besides, I happen to have five aunts in Boston, and this is a splendid time to pay a round of calls See you to-morrow morning, Oscar "

She marched off toward the street "Hey," cried the Inspector "You've got those eye-glasses " But she did not hear him

The cop who had joined them on the running board was just finishing a quick and thorough frisking of the arrested man "Six hundred and forty bucks in his poke," he announced Piper remembered that there had been six hundred and fifty dollars entered on the bank deposit slip which was crammed into Merlin's ash-stand, and he thought no more of the spectacles By the time he put his prisoner aboard the six o'clock train for New York he had forgotten them entirely

Miss Hildegard Withers had a belated but pleasant luncheon in a tea-room on Milk Street, during which time something must have made her change her plans considerably, for she left the place only to take a taxicab for the airport again This time she, and not the plane, had to wait, but all the same she arrived back in the magic island of Manhattan before the train bearing Piper and his prisoner southward was well out of the environs of Boston The five aunts would have to wait

"Thirty-five Park Avenue," Miss Withers told her cab-driver She found herself ringing the bell outside the door marked "8A" before she had made up her mind as to what she intended to say

A tense and silent Lorna Davies let her in

"I've been busy—" Miss Withers began

"But Richie is still in jail!" The young woman's voice was oddly high and nervous, for all her air of smoothness "You haven't done anything about getting him out. You must! I'll do anything—pay anything "

"Anything?" Miss Withers leaned forward "Would you be willing to confess to the killing of John-Merlin to save your husband?"

There was a long and dreadful silence while Lorna tried to light a cigarette with a match held six inches from its tip She stared at the wall Finally she rose to her feet, gripping the back of her chair and twisting her tall curving body to face Miss Withers—or anything else

"Yes!" she whispered "I——"

"Never mind," said the schoolteacher, clearing her throat She took a crumpled slip of paper from her purse, and handed it to the girl "I think this is your signature?"

Lorna glanced at the cheque for \$2500, and nodded

"Your mysterious errands this morning had to do with stopping payment on it?"

Lorna shook her head "No—I was raising funds to cover it You see, I—I——"

Miss Withers understood "It was more than you had in the bank? I didn't think of that But my dear child, you ought to know better than to try to make money by playing cards"

Lorna's eyes narrowed "You know everything, don't you?"

Miss Withers shrugged "Almost everything I know that you have been finding it more and more difficult to finance the lovable young artist you married—even the Gault bonds depreciate like everyone's else Your friends were coming to Merlin's apartment to play, and you got in the habit of joining them Perhaps you were lonely when your husband worked late—or perhaps you were lucky at first and made money"

Lorna nodded dully

"Last night you went upstairs to play poker," Miss Withers continued "You lost—and plunging, lost still more, until when you returned to your own apartment you left behind you a cheque for more money that you had in the bank You brought along with you—this!"

Miss Withers produced the jack of diamonds "You took it! I thought——"

"Let me finish At the time you very wisely wondered if the game was a fair one With your husband's help you discovered somehow that the back of this card—and presumably of the other face cards in the deck—was marked Shaded, I think they call it"

Lorna nodded "We pinned it on his drawing board, and studied it with a magnifying glass The shading finally showed—when we tried a coloured glass——"

"It also showed through the spectacles that Jack Merlin wore when he played cards," Miss Withers explained She patted her handbag "But never mind that now Up until your return from the card game, your husband had been painting, for oil paints dry quite quickly, and his work was still wet, this morning When he realised the trick, he very rashly rushed upstairs—dressed just as he was—to face Merlin The gambler tried to throw him out, and you heard them fighting up there and followed You arrived to see your husband getting the worst of it——"

"Merlin was choking him," said Lorna Davies slowly "Choking him and laughing I used to be a six handicap golfer I couldn't stand by—I snatched up the poker, and—I didn't mean to——"

Suddenly she broke, and fell to her knees But her voice was even "I *killed* him!"

"I know," Miss Withers said softly "I know all the rest You hurried out, with the card your husband had taken up to confront Merlin Richie stayed behind to wipe away fingerprints,

and was seen when he finally left That is why he didn't telephone the police "

"I can't guess who did," said Lorna, as if she didn't really care

"It was the other man who visited Merlin late at night," Miss Withers told her "Perhaps because he hoped they'd find clues leading away from himself He was a racketeer named Feets Titus, who acted as Merlin's bodyguard and messenger He wouldn't have mixed well with the type of guests that Merlin had, so he only came in late at night to get the evening's receipts Some banks, you know, have night boxes where deposits can be made at any hour Titus came in this morning shortly after your husband was seen leaving Merlin's apartment, and found his employer dead With a bad police record, and indeed, wanted in various cities and *de trop* almost everywhere, Titus knew he would be blamed for this murder or sent back to Chicago or elsewhere to face another charge, so he took the deposit which was ready for the bank, disposed of the cheques, and used the money for a getaway He used a violin-case as part of his disguise, and at the last moment snatched the glasses from the dead man as an added precaution "

Miss Withers paused for breath "He—he got away?" Lorna asked

The schoolteacher nodded "Miles away And now——"

She was interrupted by a thunderous knocking upon the apartment door Lorna Davies tried hard to breathe "They've come—for me?"

"Lorna! Darling, let me in!" came a man's voice

Lorna Davies gripped Miss Withers' arm, with icy fingers "It's Rich! They've let him go!" She spoke swiftly in Miss Withers' ear "May I have just an hour with him before—before——"

The schoolteacher nodded, and Lorna ran to the door In a moment she was in the arms of a slim, rather handsome young man "For heaven's sake, stop crying!" cried Richie Davies "It's all right, I tell you The police have got a man whom they say did it We're——" Then he saw Miss Withers, watching

"Oh——" He was introduced to Miss Withers

"I was just leaving," said that lady "My, it is getting late "

Lorna followed her to the door "Then—I suppose I'll hear from—from your friends later in the evening "

"Before midnight," Miss Withers said Her voice was hollow, though she tried to make it casual As she went down the hall she realised that never before in her life had a triumph been so tasteless, so empty She had unravelled the yarn—she had run the quarry to earth And there was no savour in it

"I'm a sentimental old fool," said Miss Withers to herself "This is why women make bad detectives Because they haven't

the courage to——” She shook her shoulders, and set off for Centre Street

At eleven fifteen that evening a sharp ring came at the door of the Davies' apartment. Lorna was just signing her name at the bottom of a long sheet of paper covered with smooth, even lines written with heart's blood and ink. Beside it lay a long envelope marked "To the Police"

Her young husband, his face white and desperate, faced her "Not yet!" he cried "She said twelve——"

Lorna Davies raised her lips to his "Kiss me, Rich," she said softly. "And—give me a drink, please"

Two pale yellow cocktails stood on a little tray beside her. But Richie shook his head "She *said* twelve," he repeated stubbornly. Another ring at the doorbell, and he crossed the room softly "Who's there?"

"Western Union Messenger Service," came a squeaky voice. It was not that of a boy

Lorna Davies took up her cocktail "A stirrup-cup, Richie!"

"Wait," he whispered. He came closer to the door. "Push it underneath, there's a good chap"

A white envelope slid through the crack "I'll wait and see if there's any answer," came the squeaky voice

Lorna, the glass almost at her lips, watched her young husband tear open the message addressed to her. He read it—as he thought—aloud, his lips making no sound

Then he tottered toward his wife, and she took it from his fingers "Dear Lorna Davies," it began, "I have spent the evening reading up the police record of a Mr Feets Titus, who—the authorities are convinced—killed Jack Merlin in your apartment house last night. They believe that he killed Merlin in a dispute, and took the money as an afterthought. They are also of the opinion that Merlin will plead guilty to second degree murder to escape worse charges elsewhere. It seems to me that a racketeer who has run down little children belongs behind bars much more than others I have in mind. Therefore I am not going to raise my voice against the wisdom of the Force . . . signed, Hildegarde Withers" There was also a postscript "As my fee in this case I am keeping the jack of diamonds. I suggest that you both take up the study of chess for these long spring evenings"

"Hey! Is there any answer?" Western Union was growing tired. Lorna Davies tore open the door and handed a twenty dollar bill to the septuagenarian who waited there, and he hobbled off in blank amazement.

She found Richie pouring two pale yellow cocktails into the sink, with trembling hands. For a long time they did not speak

At that moment, Miss Hildegarde Withers was standing in her

own little west-side apartment, critically eyeing a playing card which she had slipped into a tiny wall-frame, wrong end up. The essential wrongness did not appear until you stared at the card through a pair of large spectacles, slightly tinted with amber—and then two spokes on the left side of the bicycle wheel design stood out bold and black above the rest.

Hands on her hips, Miss Withers surveyed the sole relic of her exciting day. She hummed softly the immortal line—"To make the punishment fit the crime." With a sense of duty well done, she prepared for bed.

Albert Campion

BORDERLINE CASE

By

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

IT was so hot in London that night that we slept with the wide skylight in our city studio open and let the sootblacks fall in on us willingly, so long as they brought with them a single stirring breath to move the stifling air. Heat hung on the dark horizons and beneath our particular bowl of sky the city fidgeted, breathless and uncomfortable.

The early editions of the evening papers carried the story of the murder. I read it when they came along about three o'clock on the following afternoon. My mind took in the details lazily, for my eyelids were sticky and the printed words seemed remote and unrelated to reality.

It was a straightforward little incident, or so I thought, and when I had read the guarded half-column I threw the paper over to Albert Campion, who had drifted in to lunch and had stayed to sit quietly in a corner, blinking behind his spectacles, existing, merely, in the sweltering day.

The newspapers called the murder the "Coal Court Shooting Outrage" and the facts were simple.

At one o'clock in the morning, when Vacation Street, N E, had been a deserted lane of odoriferous heat, a policeman on the beat had seen a man stumble and fall to the pavement. The intense discomfort of the night being uppermost in his mind he had not unnaturally diagnosed a case of ordinary collapse and, after loosening the stranger's collar, had summoned the ambulance.

When the authorities arrived, however, the man was pronounced to be dead, and the body was taken to the mortuary, where it was discovered that death had been due to a bullet wound neatly placed between the shoulder blades. The bullet had made a small blue hole and, after perforating the left lung, had furrowed the heart itself, finally coming to rest in the bony structure of the chest.

Since this was so, added to the fact that the police-constable heard no untoward sound, it had been reasonable to believe that the shot had been fired at some little distance from a gun with a silencer.

Mr Campion was only politely interested. The afternoon certainly was hot, and the story as it then appeared was hardly original or exciting. He sat on the floor reading it patiently, his long thin legs stretched out in front of him.

"Some one died at any rate," he remarked at last, and added after a pause "Poor chap Out of the frying pan Dear me, I suppose it's the locality which predisposes one to think of that Ever seen Vacation Street, Margery?"

I did not answer him I was thinking how odd it was that a general irritant like the heat should make the dozens of situations arising all around one in the great city seem suddenly almost personal I found I was desperately sorry for the man who had been shot, whoever he was

It was Stanislaus Oates who told us the real story behind the half-column in the evening paper He came in just after four looking for Campion He was a detective-inspector in those days, and had just begun to develop the habit of chatting over his problems with the pale young man in the horn-rimmed spectacles There was an odd relationship It was certainly not a case of the clever amateur and the humble policeman, rather the irritable and pugnacious policeman taking it out of the inoffensive, friendly representative of the general public

On this occasion Oates was rattled

"It's a case right down your street," he said briefly to Campion as he sat down "Seems to be a miracle, for one thing"

He explained after a while, having salved his conscience by pointing out that he had no business to discuss the case, and excusing himself most illogically on grounds of the heat

"It's 'low class' crime," he went on briskly "Practically gang shooting And probably quite uninteresting to all of you, who like romance in your crimes However, it's got me right down on two counts the first because the man who shot the fellow who died couldn't possibly have done so, and second because I was wrong about the girl They're so true to type, these girls, that you can't even rely on the proverbial exception"

He sighed as if the discovery had really grieved him

We heard the story of Josephine as we sat round in the paralytically hot studio and, although I never saw the girl then or afterwards, I shall not forget the scene, the three of us listening, breathing rather heavily, while the inspector talked

She had been Donovan's girl, so Oates said, and he painted a picture of her for us, slender and flat-chested, with black hair and eyes like a Russian madonna's in a transparent face She wore blouses, he said, with lace on them and gold ornaments, little chains and crosses and frail brooches whose security was reinforced by gilt safety-pins She was only twenty, Oates said, and added enigmatically that he would have betted on her, but that it served him right, and showed him there was no fool like an old one

He went on to talk about Donovan, who, it seemed, was thirty-five and had spent ten years of his life in jail The inspector did

not seem to think any the less of him for that. The fact seemed to put the man in a definite category in his mind and that was all.

"Robbery with violence and the R O boys," he said with a wave of his hand and smiled contentedly as though he had made everything clear. "She was sixteen when he found her and he's given her hell ever since."

While he still held our interest he mentioned Johnny Gilchick. Johnny Gilchick was the man who was dead.

Oates, who was never more sentimental than was strictly reasonable in the circumstances, let himself go about Josephine and Johnny Gilchick. It was love, he said, love sudden, painful and ludicrous, and he admitted that he liked to see it.

"I had an aunt once who used to talk about the Real Thing," he explained, "and embarrassingly silly the old lady sounded, and after seeing those two youngsters meet and flame and go on until they were a single fiery entity—youngsters who were pretty ordinary tawdry material without it—I find myself sympathising with the idea if not condoning the phrase."

He hesitated and his smooth grey face cracked into a deprecating smile.

"Well we were both wrong, anyway," he murmured, "my aunt and I. Josephine let her Johnny down just as you'd expect her to, and after he got what was coming to him and was lying in the mortuary he was born to lie in, she upped and perjured her immortal soul to swear his murderer an alibi. Not that her testimony is of much value as evidence. That's beside the point. The fact remains that she's certainly done her best. You may think me sentimental, but it depresses me. I thought that girl was genuine, and my judgment was out."

Mr. Campion stirred.

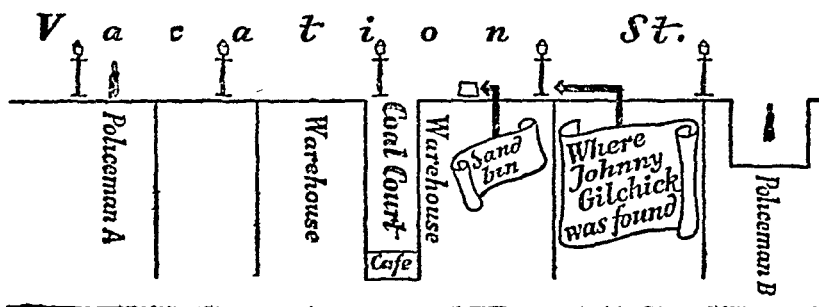
"Could we have the details?" he asked politely. "We've only seen the evening paper. It wasn't a very full report."

Oates glared at him balefully.

"Frankly the facts are exasperating," he said. "There's a little catch in them somewhere. It must be something so simple that I missed it altogether. That's really why I've come to look for you. I thought you might care to come along and take a glance at the place. What about it?"

There was no general movement. It was too hot to stir. Finally the inspector took up a piece of chalk and sketched a rough diagram on the bare boards of the model's throne.

"This is Vacation Street," he said, edging the chalk along a crack. "It's the best part of a mile long. Up this end, here by the chair, it's nearly all wholesale houses. This sand-bin I'm sketching in now marks the boundary of two police divisions. We'll take that as the starting point. Well, here, ten yards to the left, is the



entrance to Coal Court, which is a cul-de-sac composed of two blank backs of warehouse buildings and a café at the far end. The café is open all night. It serves the printers from the two big presses farther down the road. That's its legitimate trade. But it is also a sort of unofficial headquarters for Donovan's mob. Josephine sits at the desk downstairs and keeps an eye on the door. God knows what hours she keeps. She always seems to be there."

He paused and there came into my mind a recollection of the breathless night through which we had all passed, and I could imagine the girl sitting there in the stuffy shop with her thin chest and her great black eyes.

The inspector was still speaking.

"Now," he said, "there's an upstairs room in the café. It's on the second floor. That's where our friend Donovan spent most of his evening. I expect he had a good few friends with him and we shall locate them all in time."

He bent over the diagram.

"Johnny Gilchick died here," he said, drawing a circle about a foot beyond the square which indicated the sand-bin. "Although the bobby was right down the road he saw him pause under the lamp-post, stagger and fall. He called the constable from the other division and they got the ambulance. All that is plain sailing. There's just one difficulty. Where was Donovan when he fired the shot? There were two policemen in the street at the time, remember. At the moment of the actual shooting one of them, the Never Street man, was making a round of a warehouse yard, but the other, the Phyllis Court chap, was there on the spot, not 40 yards away, and it was he who actually saw Johnny Gilchick fall, although he heard no shot. Now I tell you, Campion, there's not an ounce of cover in the whole of that street. How did Donovan get out of the café? Where did he stand to shoot Johnny neatly through the back? And how did he get back again without being seen? The side walls of the cul-de-sac are solid concrete backs of warehouses, there is no way round from the back of the café, nor

could he possibly have gone over the roofs. The warehouses tower over the café like liners over a tug. Had he come out down the road one or other of the bobbies must have been certain to have seen him. How did he do it?"

"Perhaps Donovan didn't do it," I ventured and received a pitying glance for my temerity.

"That's the one fact," said the inspector heavily. "That's the only thing I do know. I know Donovan. He's one of the few English mob boys who carry a gun. He served five years with the gangs in New York both before and after Repeal and he has the misfortune to take his liquor in bouts. After each bout he has a period of black depression, during which he may do anything. Johnny Gilchick used to be one of Donovan's mob and when Johnny fell for the girl he turned in the gang, which was adding insult to injury where Donovan was concerned."

He paused and smiled.

"Donovan was bound to get Johnny in the end," he said. "It was never anything but a question of time. The whole mob expected it. The neighbourhood was waiting for it. Donovan had said openly that the next time Johnny dropped into the café would be his final appearance there. Johnny called last night, was ordered out of the place by the terrified girl, and finally walked out of the cul-de-sac. He turned the corner and strolled down the road. Then he was shot by Donovan. There's no way round it, Campion. The doctors say that death was as near instantaneous as may be. Johnny Gilchick could not have walked three paces with that bullet in his back. As for the gun, that was pretty obviously Donovan's, too. We haven't actually picked it up yet, but we know he had one of the type we are after. It's a clear case, a straightforward case, if only we knew where Donovan stood when he fired the shot."

Mr Campion looked up. His eyes were thoughtful behind his spectacles.

"The girl gave Donovan an alibi?" he inquired.

Oates shrugged his shoulders. "Rather," he said. "She was passionate about it. He was there the whole time, every minute of the time, never left the upper room once in the whole evening. I could kill her and she would not alter her story, she'd take her dying oath on it, and so on and so on. It didn't mean anything either way. Still, I was sorry to see her doing it, with her boyfriend barely cold. She was sucking up to the mob, of course, probably had excellent reasons for doing so. Yet, as I say, I was sorry to hear her volunteering the alibi before she was asked."

"Ah! She volunteered it, did she?" Campion was interested.

Oates nodded and his small grey eyes widened expressively.

"Forced it on us. Came roaring round to the police station with it. Threw it off her chest as if she were doing something fine

I'm not usually squeamish about that sort of thing, but it gave me a distinct sense of distaste, I don't mind telling you. Frankly, I gave her a piece of my mind. Told her to go and look at the body, for one thing."

"Not kind of you," observed Mr. Campion mildly. "And what did she do?"

"Oh, blubbered herself sick, like the rest of 'em." Oates was still disgruntled. "Still, that's not of interest. What girls like Josephine do or don't do doesn't really matter. She was saving her own skin. If she hadn't been so enthusiastic about it I'd have forgiven her. It's Donovan who is important. Where was Donovan when he fired?"

The shrill chatter of the telephone answered him and he glanced at me apologetically.

"I'm afraid that's mine," he said. "You didn't mind, did you? I left the number with the sergeant."

He took off the receiver, and as he bent his head to listen his face changed. We watched him with an interest it was far too hot to dissemble.

"Oh," he said flatly, after a long pause. "Really? Well, it doesn't matter either way, does it? Still, what did she do it for? What? I suppose so. Yes? Really?"

He seemed suddenly astounded as his informant at the other end of the wire evidently came out with a second piece of information more important than the first.

"You can't be certain . . . you are? What?"

The far-away voice explained busily. We could hear its steady drone. Inspector Oates's exasperation grew.

"Oh, all right, all right," he said at last. "I'm crackers . . . we're all crackers . . . have it your own damned way!"

With which vulgar outburst he rang off.

"Alibi sustained?" inquired Mr. Campion.

"Yes." The inspector grunted out the word. "A couple of printers who were in the downstairs room swear Donovan did not go out through the shop all the evening. They're sound fellows. Make good witnesses. Yet Donovan shot Johnny. I'm certain of it. He shot him clean through the concrete angle of a piano warehouse as far as I can see." He turned to Campion almost angrily. "Explain that, can you?"

Mr. Campion coughed. He seemed a little embarrassed.

"I say, you know," he ventured, "there are just two things that occur to me."

"Then out with them, son." The inspector lit a cigarette and wiped his face. "Out with them. I'm not proud."

Mr. Campion coughed. "Well, the—er—heat, for one thing,

don't you know," he said with profound uneasiness "The heat, and one of your concrete walls"

"The inspector swore a little and apologised

"If any one could forget this heat he's welcome," he said "What's the matter with the wall?"

Mr Campion bent over the diagram on the boards of the throne He was very apologetic

"Here is the angle of the warehouse," he said, "and here is the sand-bin Here to the left is the lamp-post where Johnny Gilchick was found Farther on to the left is the P C from Never Street examining a courtyard and temporarily off the scene, while to the right, on the other side of the entrance to Coal Court, is another constable, P C some-one-or-other, of Phyllis Court One is apt to—er—think of the problem as though it were contained in four solid walls, two concrete walls, two policemen"

He hesitated and glanced timidly at the inspector

"When is a policeman not a concrete wall, Oates? In—er—well, in just such heat—do you think, or don't you?"

Oates was staring at him, his eyes narrowed

"Damn it!" he said explosively "Damn it, Campion, I believe you're right I knew it was something so simple that it was staring me in the face"

They stood together looking down at the diagram Oates stooped to put a chalk cross at the entrance to the cul-de-sac

"It was *that* lamp-post," he said "Give me that telephone Wait till I get hold of that fellow"

While he was carrying on an excited conversation we demanded an explanation from Mr Campion and he gave it to us at last, mild and apologetic as usual

"Well, you see," he said, "there's the sand-bin The sand-bin marks the boundary of two police divisions Policeman A, very hot and tired, sees a man collapse from the heat under a lamp-post on his own territory The man is a little fellow and it occurs to Policeman A that it would be a simple matter to move him to the next lamp-post on the other side of the sand-bin, where he would automatically become the responsibility of Policeman B, who is even now approaching Policeman A achieves the change and is bending over the prostrate figure when his colleague comes up Since he knows nothing of the bullet wound the entrance to the cul-de-sac, with the clear view to the café second floor room, has no significance in his mind To-day, when it's full importance must have dawned upon him, he evidently thinks it best to hold his tongue"

Oates came back from the phone triumphant

"The first bobby went on leave this morning," he said "He was an old hand He must have spotted the chap was dead, took

it for granted it was the heat, and didn't want to be held up here by the inquest Funny I didn't see that in the beginning "

We were all silent for some moments

"Then the girl?" I began at last

The inspector frowned and made a little grimace of regret

"A pity about the girl," he said "Of course it was probably an accident Our man who saw it happen said he couldn't be sure "

I stared at him and he explained, albeit a little hurriedly

"Didn't I tell you? When my sergeant phoned about the alibi he told me As Josephine crossed the road after visiting the mortuary this morning she stepped under a bus . Oh yes, instantly "

He shook his head He seemed uncomfortable

"She thought she was making a gesture when she came down to the station, don't you see The mob must have told her to swear that no one had been in the upstairs room, that must have been their first story until they saw how the luck lay So when she came beetling down to us she must have thought she was risking her life to give her Johnny's murderer away, while instead of that she was simply giving the fellow an alibi Funny the way things happen, isn't it?"

He glanced at Campion affectionately

"It's because you don't get your mind cluttered up with the human element that you see these things so quickly," he said "You see everything in terms of A and B It makes all the difference "

Mr Campion, the most gentle of men, made no comment at all

Susan Dare

SPIDER

By

MIGNON G EBERHART

"**B**UT it is fantastic," said Susan Dare, clutching the telephone. "You can't just be afraid. You've got to be afraid of something." She waited, but there was no reply.

"You mean," she said presently, in a hushed voice, "that I'm to go to this perfectly strange house, to be the guest of a perfectly strange woman——"

"To you," said Jim Byrne. "Not, I tell you, to me."

"But you said you had never seen her——"

"Don't maunder," said Jim Byrne sharply. "Of course I've never seen her. Now, Susan, do try to get this straight. This woman is Caroline Wray. One of the Wrays."

"Perfectly clear," said Susan. "Therefore I'm to go to her house and see why she's got an attack of nerves. Take a bag and prepare to spend the next few days as her guest. I'm sorry, Jim, but I'm busy. I've got to do a murder story this week and——"

"Sue," said Jim, "I'm serious."

Susan paused abruptly. He *was* serious.

"It's—I don't know how to explain it, Susan," he said. "It's just—well, I'm Irish, you know. And I'm—fey. Don't laugh."

"I'm not laughing," said Susan. "Tell me exactly what you want me to do."

"Just—watch things. There ought not to be any danger—don't see how there could be. To you."

Susan realised that she was going. "How many Wrays are there, and what do you think is going to happen?"

"There are four Wrays. But I don't know what is going on that has got Caroline so terrified. It was that—the terror in her voice—that made me call you."

"What's the number of the house?" said Susan.

He told her. "It's away north," he said. "One of those old houses—narrow, tall, hasn't changed, I suppose, since old Ephineas Wray died. He was a close friend, you know, of my father's. Don't know why Caroline called me. I suppose some vague notion that a man on a newspaper would know what to do. Now let me see—there's Caroline. She's the daughter of Ephineas Wray. David is his grandson and Caroline's nephew and the only man—except

the houseman—in the place He's young—in his twenties, I believe His father and mother died when he was a child "

"You mean there are three women?"

"Naturally There's Marie—she is old Wrays' adopted daughter—not born a Wray, but more like him than the rest of them And Jessica—she's Caroline's cousin, but she's always lived with the Wrays because her father died young People always assume that the three women are sisters Actually, of course, they are not But old Ephineas Wray left his fortune divided equally among them "

"And they all live there together?"

"Yes David's not married "

"Is that," said Susan, at the note of finality in his voice, "all you know about them?"

"Absolutely everything Not much for you to go on, is it? It was just," said Jim Byrne soberly, with the effect of a complete explanation, "that she was so—so horribly scared Old Caroline, I mean "

Susan repeated the address slowly before she said again "What was she afraid of?"

"I don't know," said Jim Byrne "And—it's queer—but I don't think she knew either "

It was approaching five o'clock, with a dark fog rolling up from the lake and blending itself with the early winter twilight, when Susan Dare pressed the bell beside the wide old door—pressed it and waited Lights were on in the street, but the house before her was dark, its windows curtained The door was heavy and secretive

But they were expecting her—or at least Caroline Wray was, it had all been arranged by telephone Susan wondered what Caroline had told them, what Jim Byrne had told Caroline to say to explain her presence, and, suddenly, what Caroline was like

*"Little Johnny hung his sister
She was dead before they missed her.
Johnny's always up to tricks,
Ain't he cute, and only six——"*

The jingle had been haunting her with the persistency of a popular dance tune, and it gave accent to the impatient little beat of her brown Oxford shoe upon the stone step Then a light flashed on above the door Susan took a deep breath of the moist cold air and felt a sudden tightening of her nerves The door was going to open

It swung wider, and a warm current of air struck Susan's cheeks

Beyond was a dimly lit hall and a woman's figure—a tall, corseted figure with full sweeping skirts

"Yes?" said a voice harshly out of the dimness

"I am Susan Dare," said Susan

"Oh—oh, yes" The figure moved aside and the door opened wider "Come in, Miss Dare We were expecting you"

Afterward Susan remembered her own hesitation on the dark threshold as the door closed with finality behind her, and the woman turned

"I am Miss Jessica Wray," she said

Jessica This was the cousin, then

She was a tall woman, large-boned, with a heavy, dark face, thick iron-grey hair done high and full on her head, and long, strong hands She was dressed after a much earlier fashion, one which, indeed, Susan was unable to date

"We were expecting you," she said "Caroline, however, was obliged to go out" She paused just under the light and beside a long mirror

Susan had a confused impression of the house, in that moment, an impression of old, crowded elegance The mirror was wavery and framed in wide gilt, there were ferns in great marble urns, there were marble figures

"We'll go up to your room," said Jessica "Caroline said you would be in Chicago for several days This way You can leave your bag here James will take it up later, he is out just now"

Susan put down her small suitcase, and followed Jessica The newel post and stair rail were heavy and carved The steps were carpeted and thickly padded And the house was utterly, completely still As they ascended the quiet stairs it grew increasingly hot and airless

At the top of the stairs Jessica turned with a rigid motion of her strong body

"Will you wait here a moment?" she said "I'm not sure which room——"

Susan made some assenting gesture, and Jessica turned along the passage which ran toward the rear of the house

So terrifically hot the house was So crowded with old and almost sentient furniture So very silent

Susan moved a bit restively It was not a pleasant house But Caroline had to be afraid of something—not just silence and heat and brooding, secretive old walls She glanced down the length of hall, moved again to put her hand upon the tall newel post of the stair rail beside her The carved top of it seemed to shift and move slightly under the pressure of her hand and confirmed in the strangest way her feeling that the house itself had a singular kind of life

Then she was staring straight ahead of her through an open, lighted doorway. Beyond it was a large room, half bedroom and half sitting-room. A lamp on a table cast a circle of light, and beside the table, silhouetted against the light, sat a woman with a book in her lap.

It must be Marie Wray—the older sister, the adopted Wray who was more like old Ephineas Wray than any of them.

Her face was in shadow with the light beyond it, so Susan could see only a blunt, fleshy white profile and a tight knot of shining black hair above a massive black silk bosom. She did not, apparently, know of Susan's presence, for she did not turn. There was a kind of patience about that massive, relaxed figure, a waiting. An enormous black female spider waiting in a web of shadows. But waiting for what?

The suggestion was not one calculated to relieve the growing tension of Susan's nerves. The heat was making her dizzy, fanciful. Calling a harmless old woman a black spider merely because she was wearing a shiny black silk dress! Marie Wray still, so far as Susan could see, did not look at her, but there was suddenly the flicker of a motion on the table.

Susan looked and caught her breath in an incredulous little gasp.

There was actually a small grey creature on that table, directly under the lamplight. A small grey creature with a long tail. It sat down nonchalantly, pulled the lid off a box and dug its tiny hands into the box.

"It's a monkey," thought Susan, with something like a clutch of hysteria. "It's a monkey—a spider monkey, is it?—with that tiny face."

It was turning its face jerkily about the room, peering with bright, anxious eyes here and there, and busily, furiously eating candy. It failed somehow to see Susan, or perhaps she was too far away to interest it. There was suddenly something curiously unreal about the scene. That, thought Susan, or the heat in this fantastic house, and turned at the approaching rustle of skirts down the passage. It was Jessica, and she looked at Susan and then through the open doorway and smiled coldly.

"Marie is deaf," she said. "I suppose she didn't realise you were here."

"No," said Susan.

"I'll tell her——" She made a stiff gesture with her long hand and turned to enter the room beyond the open door. As her grey silk rustled through the door the little monkey jerked around, gave her one piercing black glance and was gone from the table in a swift grey streak. He fled across the room, darted under an old sofa.

But Jessica did not reprove him "Marie," she said loudly and distinctly

There was a pause Jessica's flowing grey silk skirts were now silhouetted against the table lamp, and the monkey absently began to lick its paw

"Yes, Jessica" The voice was that of a person long deaf—entirely without tone

"Susan Dare is here—you know—the daughter of Caroline's friend Do you want to see her?"

"See her? No No, not now Later"

"Very well Do you want anything?"

"No"

"Your cushions?"

Jessica's rigid back bent over Marie as she arranged a cushion Then she turned and walked again toward Susan Susan felt queerly fascinated and somehow oddly shocked to note that, as Jessica turned her rigid back to the room, the monkey darted out from under the sofa and was suddenly skittering across the room again in the direction of the table and the candy

He would be, thought Susan, one very sick monkey The house was too hot, and yet Susan shivered a bit Why did people keep monkeys?

"This way," said Jessica firmly, and Susan preceded her down the hall and into exactly the kind of bedroom she might have expected it to be

But Jessica did not intend to leave her alone to explore its Victorian vastnesses Under her somewhat unnerving dark gaze, Susan removed her cock-eyed little hat, smoothed back her light hair and put her coat across a chair, only to have it placed immediately by Jessica in the enormous gloomy wardrobe The servants, said Jessica, were out, the second girl and James because it was their half-day out, the cook to do an errand

"You are younger than I should have expected," she said abruptly to Susan "Shall we go down now?"

As they passed down the stairs to the drawing-room, a clock somewhere struck slowly, with long trembling variations

"Five," said Jessica "Caroline ought to return very soon And David He usually reaches home shortly after five That is, if it isn't rainy Traffic sometimes delays him But it isn't rainy to-night!"

"Foggy," said Susan, and obeyed the motion of Jessica's long grey hand toward a chair It was not, however, a comfortable chair And neither were the moments that followed comfortable, for Jessica sat sternly erect in a chair opposite Susan, folded her hands firmly in her silk lap and said exactly nothing Susan started to speak a time or two, thought better of it, and herself sat in

rather rigid silence And was suddenly aware that she was acutely receptive to sight and sound and feeling

It was not a pleasant sensation

For she felt queerly as if the lives that were living themselves out in that narrow old house were pressing in upon her—as if long-spoken words and long-stuffed whispers were living yet in the heated air.

She stirred restively and tried not to think of Marie Wray Queer how difficult it was, once having seen Marie and heard her speak, not to think of that brooding figure—sitting in its web of shadows, waiting

Three old women living in an old house What were their relations to one another? Two of them she had seen and had heard speak, and knew no more of them than she had known What about Caroline—the one who was afraid? She stirred again and knew Jessica was watching her

They heard the bell, although it rang in some back part of the house Jessica looked satisfied and rose

"It's David," she said At the door into the hall she added in a different tone "And I suppose Caroline, too"

Susan knew she was tense Yet there was nothing in that house for her—Susan Dare—to fear It was Caroline who was afraid

Then another woman stood in the doorway Caroline, no doubt A tall slender woman, a blonde who had faded into tremulous, wispy uncertainty She did not speak Her eyes were large and blue and feverish, and two bright pink spots fluttered in her thin cheeks, and her bare thin hands moved Susan rose and went to her and took the two hands

"But you're so young," said Caroline Disappointment throbbed in her voice

"I'm not really," said Susan

"And so little——" breathed Caroline

"But that doesn't matter at all," said Susan, speaking slowly, as one does to a nervous child There were voices in the hall, but she was mainly aware of Caroline

"No, I suppose not," said Caroline, finally looking into Susan's eyes Terrified, Jim had said Curious how right Jim managed to be

Caroline's eyes sought into Susan's, and she was about to speak when there was a rustle in the doorway Caroline's uncertain lips closed in a kind of gasp, and Jessica swept into the room

But I must know what she's afraid of, thought Susan I must get her alone—away from Jessica

"Take off your coat, Caroline," said Jessica "Don't stand there I see you've spoken to Susan Dare Put away your hat and coat and then come down again"

"Yes, Jessica," said Caroline Her hands were moving again, and she looked away

"Go on," said Jessica Her voice was not sharp, it was merely undefeatable

"Yes, Jessica," said Caroline

"Marie is reading," said Jessica. "You needn't speak to her now unless you wish to do so You may take Susan Dare in to see her later "

"Yes, Jessica "

Caroline disappeared and in her place stood a man, and Susan was murmuring words of acknowledgment to Jessica's economical introduction

David, too, was blond, and his eyes were darkly blue He was slender and fairly tall, his mouth was fine and sensitive, and there was a look about his temples and around his eyes that was—Susan sought for the word and found it—wistful He was young and strong and vibrant—the only young thing in the house—but he was not happy Susan knew that at once He said

"How do you do, Miss Dare?"

"Don't go upstairs yet, David," said Jessica Her voice was less harsh, she watched him avidly "You ought to rest "

"Not now, Aunt Jessica I'll see you again, Miss Dare "

He walked away "Aunt Marie all right?" he called from the stairway

"Perfectly," said Jessica Her voice was harsh again "She's reading——"

Afterward Susan tried to remember whether she could actually hear David's steps upon the padded stairs or whether she was only half consciously calculating the time it took to climb the stairs—the time it took, or might have taken to walk along the hall, to enter a room She was sure that Jessica did not speak She merely sat there

Why did Jessica become rigid and harsh again when David spoke of Marie? Why did——

A loud, dreadful crash of sound shattered the silence in the house It fell upon Susan and immersed her and shook the whole house and then receded in waves. Waves that left destruction and intolerable confusion

Susan realised dimly that she was on her feet and trying to move toward the stairway, and that Jessica's mouth was grey, and that Jessica's hands were clutching her

"Oh, my God—David——" said Jessica intelligibly, and Susan pushed the woman away, from her

She reached the stairway, Jessica beside her, and at the top of the stairs two figures were locked together and struggling in the upper hall.

"Caroline," screamed Jessica "What are you doing? Where's Marie—where—"

"Let me go, Caroline!" David was pulling Caroline's thin clutching arms from around him "Let me go, I tell you Something terrible has happened You must—"

Jessica brushed past them and then was at the door of Marie's room

"*It's Marie!*" she cried harshly "*Who shot her?*"

Susan was vaguely conscious of Caroline's sobbing breaths and of David's shoulder pressing against her own Somehow they had all got to that open doorway and were crowding there together

It was Marie

She sat in the same chair in which she'd been sitting when Susan saw her so short a time ago But her head had fallen forward, her whole body crumpled grotesquely into black silk folds

Jessica was the first to enter the room Then David Susan, feeling sick and shaken, followed Only Caroline remained in the doorway, clinging to the casing with thin hands, her face like chalk and her lips blue

"She's been shot," said Jessica "Straight through the heart" Then she looked at David "Did Caroline kill her, David?"

"Caroline kill Marie! Why, Caroline couldn't kill anything!" he cried

"Then who killed her?" said Jessica "You realise, don't you, that she's dead?"

Her dark gaze probed deeper and she said in a grating whisper "Did you kill her, David?"

"No!" cried David "No!"

"She's dead," said Jessica

Susan said as crisply as she could "Why don't you call a doctor?"

Jessica's silk rustled, and she turned to give Susan a long cold look "There's no need to call a doctor Obviously she's dead"

"The police, then," said Susan softly "Obviously, too—she's been murdered"

"The police," cried Jessica scornfully "Turn over my own cousin—my own nephew—to the police Never"

"I'll call them," Susan said crisply, and whirled and left them with their dead

On the silent stairway her knees began to shake again So this was what the house had been waiting for Murder! And this was why Caroline had been afraid What, then, had she known? Where was the revolver that had shot Marie? There was nothing of the kind to be seen in the room

The air was hot—the house terribly still—and she, Susan Dare, was hunting for a telephone—calling for a number—talking quite

sensibly on the whole—and all the time it was entirely automatic action on her part. It was automatic, even when she called and found Jim Byrne.

"I'm here," she said. "At the Wrays' Marie has been murdered——"

"My God!" said Jim and slammed up the receiver.

The house was so hot. Susan sat down weakly on the bottom step and huddled against the newel post and felt extremely ill. If she were really a detective, of course, she would go straight upstairs and wring admissions out of them while they were shaken and confused and before they'd had time to arrange their several defences. But she wasn't a detective, and she had no wish to be, and all she wanted just then was to escape. Something moved in the shadows under the stairs—moved. Susan flung her hands to her throat to choke back a scream, and the little monkey whirled out, peered at her worriedly, then darted up the window curtain and sat nonchalantly on the heavy wooden rod.

Her coat and hat were upstairs. She couldn't go out into the cold and fog without them—and Jim Byrne was on the way. If she could hold out till he got there——

David was coming down the stairs.

"She says it's all right to call the police," he said in a tight voice.

"I've called them."

He looked down at her and suddenly sat on the bottom step beside her.

"It's been hell," he said quite simply. "But I didn't think of—murder." He stared at nothing, and Susan could not bear the look of horror on his young face.

"I understand," she said, wishing she did understand.

"I didn't," he said. "Until—just lately. I knew—oh, since I was a child I've known I must——"

"Must what?" said Susan gravely.

He flushed quickly and was white again.

"Oh, it's a beastly thing to say. I was the only—child, you know. And I grew up knowing that I dared have no—no favourite—you see? If there'd been more of us—or if the aunts had married and had their own children—but I didn't understand how—how violent——" the word stopped in his throat, and he coughed and went on—"how strongly they felt——"

"Who?"

"Why, Aunt Jessica, of course. And Aunt Marie. And Aunt Caroline."

"Too many aunts," said Susan dryly. "What was it they were violent about?"

"The house. And each other. And—and other things. Oh, I've

always known, but it was all—hidden, you know The surface was—all right ”

Susan groped through the fog The surface was all right, he'd said But the fog parted for a rather sickening instant and gave her an ugly glimpse of an abyss below

“Why was Caroline afraid?” said Susan

“*Caroline?*” he said, staring at her “*Afraid!*” His blue eyes were brilliant with anxiety and excitement “See here,” he said, “if you think it was Caroline who killed Marie, it wasn't She couldn't She'd never have dared I m-mean—” he was stammering in his excitement—“I mean, Caroline wouldn't hurt a fly And Caroline wouldn't have opposed Marie about anything—Marie—you don't know what Marie was like ”

“Exactly what happened in the upstairs hall?”

“You mean—when the shot——”

“Yes ”

“Why, I—I was in my room—no, not quite—I was nearly at the door And I heard the shot And it's queer, but I believe—I believe I knew right away that it was a revolver shot It was as if I had expected——” he checked himself “But I *hadn't* expected—I——” he stopped, dug his fists desperately into his pockets and was suddenly firm and controlled—“but I hadn't actually expected it, you understand ”

“Then when you heard the shot you turned, I suppose, and looked ”

“Yes Yes, I think so Anyway, there was Caroline in the hall, too I think she was screaming We were both running I thought of Marie—I don't know why But Caroline clutched at me and held me She didn't want me to go into Marie's room She was terrified And then I think you were there and Jessica Were you?”

“Yes And there was no one else in the hall? No one came from Marie's room?”

His face was perplexed, terribly puzzled

“Nobody ”

“Except—Caroline?”

“But I tell you it couldn't have been Caroline ”

The doorbell began to ring—shrill sharp peals that stabbed the shadows and the thickness of the house

It's the police, thought Susan, catching her breath sharply The boy beside her had straightened and was staring at the wide old door that must be opened

Behind them on the padded stairway something rustled “It's the police,” said Jessica harshly “Let them in ”

Susan had not realised that there would be so many of them Or that they would do so much Or that an inquiry could last so

long She had not realised either how amazingly thorough they were with their photographs and their finger-printing and their practised and rapid and incredibly searching investigation She was a little shocked and more than a little awed, sheerly from witnessing at first hand and with her own eyes what police actually did when there was murder

Yet her own interview with Lieutenant Mohrn was not difficult He was brisk, youthful, kind, and Jim Byrne was there to explain her presence She had been very thankful to see Jim Byrne, who arrived on the heels of the police

"Tell the police everything you know," he had said

"But I don't know anything"

And it was Lieutenant Mohrn who, oddly enough, brought Susan into the very centre and hub of the whole affair

But that was late—much later After endless inquiry, endless search, endless repetitions, endless conferences Endless waiting in the gloomy dining-room with portraits of dead and vanished Wrays staring fixedly down upon policemen Upon Susan Upon servants whose alibis had, Jim had informed her, been immediately and completely established.

It was close to one o'clock when Jim came to her again

"See here," he said "You look like a ghost Have you had anything to eat?"

"No," said Susan

A moment later she was in the kitchen, accepting provender that Jim Byrne brought from the icebox

"You do manage to get things done," she said "I thought newspaper men wouldn't even be permitted in the house"

"Oh, the police are all right—they'll give a statement to all of us—treat us right, you know More cake? And don't forget I'm in on this case Have you found out yet what Caroline was afraid of?"

"No I've not had a chance to talk to her Jim, who did it?"

He smiled mirthlessly.

"You're asking me! They've established, mainly, three things the servants are clear, there was no one in the house besides Jessica and David and Caroline"

"And me," said Susan with a small shudder "And—Marie"

"And you," agreed Jim imperturbably "And Marie Third, they can't find the gun Jessica and you alibi each other That leaves David and Caroline Well—which of them did it? And why?"

"I don't know," she said "But, Jim, I'm frightened"

"*Frightened!* With the house full of police? Why?"

"I don't know," said Susan again "It's nothing I can explain It's just—a queer kind of menace Somewhere—somehow—in this

house It's like Marie—only Marie is dead and this is alive Horribly alive " Susan knew she was incoherent and that Jim was staring at her worriedly, and suddenly the swinging door behind her opened, and Susan's heart leaped to her throat before the policeman spoke

"The lieutenant wants you both, please," he said

As they passed through the hall, the clock struck a single note that vibrated long afterward It had been, then, eight hours and more since she had entered that wide door and been met by Jessica

Lights were on everywhere now, and there were policemen, and the old-fashioned sliding doors between the hall and the drawing-room had been closed, and they shut in the sound of voices

"In there," said the policeman and drew back one of the doors

It was entirely silent in the heavily furnished room Lights were on in the chandelier above and it was eerily, dreadfully bright The streaks showed in the faded brown velvet curtains at the windows, and the wavery lines in the mantelpiece mirror, and the worn spots in the old Turkish rug And every grey shadow on Jessica's face was darker, and the fine, sharp lines around Caroline's mouth and her haunted eyes showed terribly clear, and there were two bright scarlet spots in David's cheeks Lieutenant Mohrn had lost his look of youth and freshness and looked the weary, greying forty that he was A detective in plain clothes was sitting on the small of his back in one of the slippery plush chairs

The door slid together again behind them, and still no one spoke, although Jessica turned to look at them And, oddly, Susan had a feeling that everything in that household had changed Yet Jessica had not actually changed, her eyes met Susan's with exactly the same cold, remote command Then what was it that was different?

Caroline—Susan's eyes went to the thin bent figure, huddled tragically on the edge of her chair Her fine hair was in wisps about her face, her mouth tremulous

Why, of course! It was not a change It was merely that both Jessica and Caroline had become somehow intensified They were both etched more sharply The shadows were deeper, the lines blacker

Lieutenant Mohrn turned to Caroline "This is the young woman you refer to, isn't it, Miss Caroline?"

Caroline's eyes fluttered to Susan, avoided Jessica, and returned fascinated to Lieutenant Mohrn "Yes—yes"

David whirled from the window and crossed to stand directly above Caroline

"Look here, Aunt Caroline, you realise that whatever you tell

Miss Dare, she'll be bound to tell the police? It's just the same thing—you know that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, David That's what—*he*—said "

Lieutenant Mohrn cleared his throat abruptly and a bit uncomfortably

"She understands that, Wray I don't know why she won't tell me But she won't And she says she will talk to Miss Dare "

"Caroline," said Jessica, "is a fool " She moved rigidly to look at Caroline, who refused to meet her eyes, and said . "You'll find Caroline's got nothing to tell "

Caroline's eyes went wildly to the floor, to the curtains, to David, and both her hands fluttered to her trembling mouth

"I'd rather talk to her," she said

"Caroline," said Jessica, "you are behaving irrationally You have been like this for days You brought this—this Susan Dare into the house You lied to me about her—told me it was a daughter of a school friend I might have known you had no such intimate friend!" She shot a dark look at Susan and swept back to Caroline "Now you've told the police that you were afraid and that you telephoned to a perfect stranger——"

"Jim Byrne," fluttered Caroline "His father and my father——"

"That means nothing," said Jessica harshly "Don't interrupt me And then this young woman comes into our house Why? Answer me, Caroline Why?"

"I—was afraid——"

"Of what?"

"I—I—" Caroline stood, motioning frantically with her hands —"I'll tell I'll tell Miss Dare She'll know what to do "

"This is the situation, Miss Dare," said Lieutenant Mohrn patiently "Miss Caroline has admitted that she was alarmed about something and why you are here She has also admitted that there was an urgent and pressing problem that was causing dissension in the household But she's—very tired, as you see—a little nervous, perhaps And she says she is willing to tell, but that she prefers talking to you " He smiled wearily "At any rate—it's asking a great deal of you—but will you hear what she has to tell? It's a whim, of course " There was something friendly and kind in the look he gave Caroline "But we'll humour her And she understands——"

"I understand," said Caroline with a flash of decision "But I don't want—any one but Susan Dare "

"Nonsense, Caroline," said Jessica "I have a right to hear So has David "

Caroline's eyes, glancing this way and that to avoid Jessica, actually met Jessica's gaze, and she succumbed at once

"Yes, Jessica," she said obediently

"All right, then Now, we are going outside, Miss Caroline You can say anything you want to say And remember we are here only to help" Lieutenant Mohrn paused at the sliding door, and Susan saw a look flash between him and Jim Byrne She also saw Jim Byrne's hand go to his pocket and the brief little nod he gave the lieutenant

"Do you mind if I stay in the room but out of earshot, Miss Jessica?" Jim asked

"No," Jessica agreed grudgingly

"We'll be just outside," said Lieutenant Mohrn, speaking to Jim Something in his voice added "Ready for any kind of trouble" She saw, too, the look in Jim's eyes as he glanced at her and then back to the lieutenant, and all at once she understood the meaning of that look and the meaning of his gesture toward his pocket He had a revolver there, then And the lieutenant was promising protection But that meant that they were going to leave her alone with the Wrays Alone with three people, one of whom was a murderer

But she was not entirely alone Jim Byrne was there, in the far corner, his eyes wary and alert and his smile unperturbed

"Very well now, Caroline," said Jessica "Let's hear your precious story"

"It's about the house," began Caroline, looking at Susan as if she dared not permit her glance to swerve "The police dragged it out of me——"

Jessica laughed harshly and interrupted

"So that's your important evidence I can tell it with less foolishness It is simply that we have had an offer of a considerable sum of money for the purchase of this house We happen to hold this house—all four of us—with equal interest Thus it is necessary for us to agree before we can sell or otherwise dispose of the property That's really all there is to it Caroline and David wanted to sell I didn't care"

"But Marie didn't want to sell," cried Caroline "And Marie was stronger than any of us"

"Miss Caroline," said Susan softly "Why were you afraid?"

For a dreadful second or two there was utter silence

Then, as dreadfully, Caroline collapsed into her chair again and put her hands over her mouth and moaned

But Jessica was ready to speak

"She had nothing to be afraid of She's merely nervous—very nervous I know, Caroline, what you have been doing with every cent of money you could get your silly hands upon But I intended to do nothing about it"

Caroline had given up her effort to avoid Jessica. She was staring at her like a terrified, panting bird.

"You—know——" she gasped in a thin, high voice.

"Of course I know. You are completely transparent, Caroline. I know that you were gambling away your inheritance—or at least what you could touch——"

"Gambling!" cried David. "What do you mean?"

"Stocks," said Jessica harshly. "Speculative stocks. It got her like a fever. Caroline has always been susceptible. So you have no money at all left, Caroline? Is that why you were so anxious to sell the house? You surely haven't been fool enough to buy on margin."

Caroline's distraught hands confessed what her trembling lips could not speak.

David was suddenly standing beside her, his hand on her thin shoulder.

"Don't worry, Aunt Carrie," he said. "It'll be all right. You've got enough in trust to take care of you."

Over Caroline's head he looked at Jessica. The look or the tenderness in his voice when he spoke to Caroline seemed to infuriate Jessica, and she arose amid a rustling of silk and stood there tall and rigid, facing him.

"Why don't you offer to take care of her yourself, David?" she said gratingly.

David was white, and his eyes brilliant with pain, but he replied steadily. "You know why, Aunt Jessica. And you know why she gambled, too. We were both trying to make enough money to get away. To get away from this house. To get away from——" He stopped.

"From what, David?" said Jessica.

"From Marie," said David desperately. "And from you."

Jessica did not move. Her face did not change. There was only a queer luminous flash in her eyes. After a horribly long moment she said:

"I loved you far better than Marie loved you, David. You feared her. I intended to give you money when you came to me. You *had* to come to me. You would have begged me for help—me, Jessica! Why did you or Caroline kill Marie? Was it because she refused to sell the house? I know why she refused. She pretended that it was sentiment, that she, the adopted daughter, was more a Wray than any of us. But it wasn't that, really. She hated us. And we wanted to sell. That is, you and Caroline wanted to sell for your own selfish interests. I—it made no difference to me."

Caroline sobbed and cried jerkily.

"But you did care, Jessica. You wanted the money. You—you

love money" There was a strangely incredulous wail in her thin voice "*Money—money!* Not the things it will buy Not the freedom it might give you But money—bonds, mortgages, gold You love money first, Jessica, and you——"

"*Caroline,*" said Jessica, in a terrible voice Caroline babbled and sobbed into silence "*Caroline,* you are not responsible You forget that there are strangers here That Marie has been murdered Try to collect yourself" At once You are making a disgusting exhibition"

All three looked at Susan

And as suddenly as they had been diverted from each other they were, for a moment, united in their feeling against Susan She was the intruder, the instrument of the police, placed there by the law for the purpose of discovering evidence.

Their eyes were not pleasant

Susan smoothed back her hair, and she was acutely aware of the small telegram of warning that ran along her nerves One of them had murdered She turned to Caroline

"Then were you afraid that Marie would discover what you had been doing with your money?" she asked gently

Caroline blinked and was immediately ready to reply, her momentary feeling against Susan disseminated by the small touch of kindness in Susan's manner

"No," she said in a confidential way "That wasn't what I was afraid of"

"Then was there something unusual about the house? Something that troubled you?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Caroline

"What was it?" asked Susan, scarcely daring to breathe If only Jessica would remain silent for another moment

But Caroline was fluttering again

"I don't know I don't know You see, it was all so queer, Marie holding out against us all, and we all—except Jessica sometimes—obeyed Marie We've always obeyed Marie Everything in the house has done that Even Spider—the—the monkey, you know"

Susan permitted her eyes to flicker toward Jessica She stood immovable, watching David Susan could not interpret that dark look, and she did not try Instead she leaned over to Caroline, took her fluttering, ineffectual hands, and said, still gently "Tell me exactly why you telephoned to Jim Byrne What was it that happened in the morning—or maybe the night before—that made you afraid?"

"How did you know?" said Caroline "It happened that night"

"What was it?" said Susan so softly that it was scarcely more than a whisper

But Caroline quite suddenly swerved.

"I wasn't afraid of Marie," she said "But every one obeyed Marie Even the house always seemed more Marie's house than—than Jessica's But I didn't kill Marie "

"Tell me," repeated Susan "What happened last night that was—queer?"

"Caroline," said Jessica harshly, dragging herself back from some deep brooding gulf, "you've said enough "

Susan ignored her and held Caroline's feverishly bright eyes with her own "*Tell me—*"

"It was—Marie——" gasped Caroline

"Marie—what did she do?" said Susan

"She didn't do anything," said Caroline "It was what she said No, it wasn't that exactly. It was——"

"If you insist upon talking, Caroline, you might at least try to be intelligible," said Jessica coldly

Could she get Jessica out of the room? thought Susan, probably not And it was all too obvious that she was standing by, permitting Caroline to talk only so long as Caroline said nothing that she, Jessica, did not want her to say Susan said quietly "Did you hear Marie speak?"

"Yes, that was just it," cried Caroline eagerly "And it was so very queer That is, of course we—that is, I—have often thought that Marie must be about the house much more than she pretended to be, in order to know all the things she knew That is, she always knew everything that happened in the house It—sometimes it was queer, you know, because it was like—like magic or something It was quite," said Caroline with an unexpected burst of imagery, "as if she had one of those astral body things, and it walked all around the house while Marie just sat there in her room "

"Astral—body—things," said Jessica deliberately Caroline crimsoned and Jessica's hands gestured outward as much as to say "You see for yourself what a state she's in "

The old room was silent again Susan's heart was pounding, and again those small tocsins of warning were sounding in some subconscious realm All those forces were silently, invisibly combating—struggling against each other And somewhere amid them was the truth—quite tangible—altogether real

"But the astral body," said Caroline suddenly into the silence, "couldn't have talked And I heard Marie speak She was in Jessica's room, and the door was closed, and I heard her talking to Jessica And then—that's what's queer—I went straight on past the door and into Marie's room, and there was Marie sitting there Isn't it queer?"

"Why were you frightened?"

"Because—because——" Caroline's hands twisted together "I don't know why Except that I had a—a feeling"

"Nonsense" Jessica laughed There was again the luminous flash in her shadowed eyes, and she spoke more rapidly than usual "You see, Susan Dare, how nonsensical all this is How utterly fantastic!"

"There was Marie," said Caroline "She was talking to you" Jessica's silks rustled, and she walked rigidly and quickly to Caroline and leaned over so that she could grip Caroline's shoulder and force Caroline to meet her eyes David tried to intervene, and she brushed him away and said hoarsely

"Caroline, you poor little fool You thought you'd get this young woman here and try to establish your innocence of the crime All this talk is sheer nonsense You are cunning after the way of fools such as you Tell me this, Caroline——" She paused long enough to take a great gasp of breath She was more powerful, more invincible than Susan had seen her "Tell me Where was David when the revolver was fired?"

Caroline was shrinking backward David said quickly "She'll say anything to protect me She'll say anything, and you——"

"Be quiet, David Caroline, answer me"

"He was at the door of his room," said Caroline

For a long moment Jessica waited Then with terrible deliberation she relaxed her grip and straightened and looked slowly from one to the other

"You've as good as confessed, Carrie," she said "There was no one else You admit that it was not David Why did you kill her, Carrie?"

"She didn't kill her!" David was between the two women, his face white and his eyes blazing "It was you, Jessica You——"

"*David! Stop!*" The two sharp exclamations were like lashes "I was here in this room when the shot was fired I didn't kill Marie I couldn't have killed her You know that Come, Caroline"

She put her grey hand upon Caroline's shoulder Caroline, as if mesmerised by that touch, arose, and Jessica turned to the doorway No one moved as the two women crossed the room Jim Byrne glanced at Susan unrevealingly and then, at Jessica's imperious gesture, opened the door Susan was vaguely aware that there were men in the hall outside, but she was held as if enchanted by the extraordinary scene she was witnessing

No one moved, and there was no sound save the rustle of Jessica's silks while she led Caroline to the stairway At the bottom step Jessica turned, and there was suddenly something less harsh in her face, it was for an instant almost kind, and there was a queer

sort of tenderness in the pressure of her hand upon Caroline's shrinking shoulder

But that hand was nevertheless compelling

"Go upstairs," she said to Caroline, in a voice loud enough so that they all heard "Go upstairs and do what is necessary There's enough veronal on my dresser We'll give you time"

She turned as if to barricade the stairway with her own rigid body and looked slowly and defiantly around her "I'll *make them* give you time, Carrie *Go on*"

There was the complete and utter silence of sheer horror And in that silence something small and grey and quick flashed down from the curtain and up the stairs

"Holy Mother," cried some one "What was that?"

And David sprang forward

"You can't do that—you can't do that! Caroline, don't move——" Susan knew that he was thrusting himself between Jessica and Caroline, that there was a sudden confusion But she was mainly aware of something that had clicked in her own mind

Somehow she got through the confusion in the hall to Lieutenant Mohrn, and Jim Byrne was at her side Both of them listened to the brief words she said, Lieutenant Mohrn ran rapidly upstairs, and Jim disappeared toward the dining-room

Jim was back first He pulled Susan to one side

"You are right," he said "The cook and the houseman both say that Marie was very strict about the monkey and that the monkey always obeyed her But what do you mean?"

"I'm not sure, Jim But I've just told Lieutenant Mohrn that I think there should be a bullet hole somewhere upstairs It was made by the second bullet It is in the ceiling, perhaps—or wall I think it's in Jessica's room"

Lieutenant Mohrn was coming down the stairway He reached the bottom of the stairs and looked wearily and a bit sadly at the group there At Caroline crumpled against the wall At David white and taut At Jessica, a rigid figure of hatred Then he sighed and looked at the policeman nearest him and nodded

"Will you go into the drawing-room, please," he asked Susan "And you, Jim"

The doors slid together and, still wearily, Lieutenant Mohrn pulled out from his pocket a revolver, a long cord, a piece of cotton, and a small alarm clock

"They were all there hidden in the newel post at the top of the stairway The carved top was loose as you remembered it, Miss Dare And there's two shots gone from the revolver, and there's a bullet hole in the wall of Jessica's bedroom How did you know it was Jessica, Miss Dare?"

"It was the monkey," said Susan Her voice sounded unnatural

in her own ears, terribly tired, terribly sad "It was the monkey all the time You see, he was sitting there, stealing candy *right beside Marie's chair* He would have been afraid to do that if he had not known she was dead And when Jessica entered the room he fled When I thought of that, the whole thing fell together the hot house, obviously to keep Marie's body warm and confuse the time of death, every one out of the house to permit Jessica to do murder, then this thing you've found——"

"It's simple, of course," said Lieutenant Mohrn "The cord fastened tight between the alarm lever and the trigger—the bit of cotton to pad the alarm The clock is set for ten minutes after five When did she hide it in the newel post?"

"When I went down to telephone the police, I suppose, and David and Caroline were in Marie's room—I want to go home," said Susan wearily

"Look here," said Jim Byrne "This sounds all right, Susan, but, remember, Marie couldn't have been dead then You heard her talk"

"I had never heard her speak before And I heard the flat, dead tone of a person who has been deaf a long time It was Caroline who actually solved the thing And Jessica knew it She knew it and at once tried to fasten the blame upon Caroline—to compel her to commit suicide"

"What did Caroline say?" Lieutenant Mohrn was very patient

"She said that she'd heard Marie speaking with Jessica in Jessica's room behind a closed door And that she'd gone straight on past that door to Marie's room and found Marie sitting there Caroline was confused, frightened, talked of astral bodies Naturally, we knew that Jessica was—rehearsing—her imitation of Marie's way of speaking"

"Premeditated," said Jim "Planned to the last detail And your coming merely gave her the opportunity You were to provide the alibi, Susan"

Susan shivered

"That was the trouble She was sitting directly opposite me when the shot was fired upstairs Yet she was the only person who hated Marie sufficiently to—murder her It wasn't money It was hatred Growing for years in this horrible house, nourished by jealousy over David, brought to a climax that was inevitable," Susan smoothed her hair "Please may I go?"

"Then Marie was dead when you entered the house?"

"Yes Propped up by pillows I—I saw the whole thing, you know Saw Jessica approach her and talk, heard the reply—and how was I to know it was Jessica speaking and not Marie? Then Jessica bent and did something to her cushions, pulled them away, I suppose, so the body was no longer erect And she turned at

once and was between me and Marie all the way to the door so I could not see Marie, then, at all I couldn't see Marie very well at any time, because she was in the shadow And when David and Caroline came upstairs, Jessica warned both of them that Marie was reading I suppose she knew that they were only too glad to be relieved of the necessity to speak to Marie" Susan shivered again and smoothed back her hair and felt dreadfully that she might cry "It's a t-terrible house," she said indecisively, and Jim Byrne said hurriedly

"She can go now, can't she? I've got a car out here She doesn't have to see them again"

The air was cold and fresh and the sky very black before dawn, and the pavements glistened

They swerved on to the drive and stopped for a red light, and Jim turned to her as they waited Through the dusk in the car she could feel his scrutiny

"I didn't expect anything like this," he said gravely "Will you forgive me?"

"Next time," said Susan in a small clear voice, "I'll not get scared"

"Next time!" said Jim derisively "There won't be a next time! I was the one that was scared I had my finger on the trigger of a revolver all the time you were talking to them No, indeed, there won't be a next time Not for you, my girl"

"Oh, all right," said Susan agreeably

Doctor Eustace Hailey

THE GOLD OF TSO-FU

By

ANTHONY WYNNE

A CLERK came into the waiting-room of Evans' China Bank in Kingsway. He held Doctor Hailey's card between his thumb and forefinger.

"You have an appointment with Sir Thomas Evans?" he asked.

"I imagine so. He sent me a telegram this morning asking me to meet him here at this hour."

"Very well. I will see if he is in his room."

The man retired. Doctor Hailey glanced round the astonishing apartment in which he found himself. No wonder Evans had the reputation of being a super-man! Who but himself would have dared to furnish a business office after the manner of King Louis XIV in the most prodigal moments of his palace-building? His eye travelled from colossal mirrors with wrought iron frames which seemed to have been fashioned by Vulcan himself, so bold and stark were the mountings of them, to delicate gildings full of the old sweetness of Venice and filigree work of wrought silver full of the cold ecstasy of winter moonlight. It was all grotesque, strange, a wild mingling of the harsh and the gentle, of beauty and sweetness, of iron and gold, and yet it expressed something clear and distinct—something magnificent beyond the splendours with which merely rich men often surround themselves. This man—

The door of the room was flung open. The clerk who had taken the doctor's card staggered in with pallid cheeks and eyes which seemed to bulge from their sockets.

"For God's sake, doctor, come quickly!" he cried in hoarse tones, "something—something awful has happened."

Doctor Hailey followed him across the immense entrance hall of the building, where tremendous groups of statuary threatened or glowed upon the astonished visitor, to a room of the same size as that which he had just quitted. The man shrank back and allowed him to enter the room alone.

The sight which met his eyes caused him to gasp, so strange and terrible was it. Facing him, its round, sinister face illuminated by a shaft of sunlight, was a huge effigy in freshly gilded wood, of

some oriental deity seated on his throne Just below the throne, lying with outstretched hands and pallid features, was the body of a young man

Doctor Hailey crossed the room and came to the body He stooped down to examine it

The man had been stabbed through the heart

He opened his waistcoat and shirt The wound was a small one He decided that the dagger with which it had been inflicted must have been wielded with the greatest precision and vigour He turned to the trembling clerk who remained at the doorway

"Do you know him?" he asked sharply

"Oh, yes It is Mr Harrier, of this office" The clerk's voice shook as he spoke

The doctor bent again and completed his examination The dead man had evidently been struck down close to the spot where he lay, because he had clutched at the god in his fall There were small flakes of the gold-beater's skin, used to gild the effigy, on his finger-tips Doctor Hailey stood up and surveyed the magnificent room with eyes which quailed The thought came to him that the mind that had planned these decorations was a mind that horror, no matter how stark, would not intimidate, a mind as ruthless as the sea

"Did Mr Harrier often come to this room?"

"Not very often, sir But he is one of the directors of the Bank"

Doctor Hailey continued his inspection In addition to the gilded god there was a beautiful replica in marble of Michael Angelo's statue of the young David, which, by comparison with that dull effigy, seemed strangely instinct with vision and power The floor was a marble checkerboard in black and white Here and there glowing carpets had been laid on it The huge fireplace was carved in lines as swift as the flames which leaped on its hearth In the centre of the apartment was a desk fashioned, as it seemed, out of a single block of ebony and crusted with dull brass along its margin Great lamps hung from the fretted roof, they were of coloured glass like the tall windows on the wall Above the head of the god was an exquisite cabinet of Japanese lacquer—the kind of lacquer work which is seen as a rule only in museums and palaces

"Sir Thomas has not come in to-day?"

The clerk shook his head He had been joined by a uniformed attendant who volunteered the information that he had watched the door of the room from the time when the murdered man entered it until the time when the crime was discovered

"I 'appened to be standing in the entrance 'all and I can swear that no one went in or came out during the 'ole time"

Doctor Hailey contracted his brow

"These windows," he remarked, "do not seem to open Am I right?"

"They don't open, sir They're built in."

A quick step sounded in the hall without The men at the door stood to attention A thick-set individual with a round face came bustling into the room

Doctor Hailey had an immediate impression of vigour both of mind and body But that impression was less definite than the sense of aversion he felt. He stiffened instinctively as he turned to greet the newcomer

"Good God, what's this ?"

The man stood still and gazed at the spectacle disclosed to him The doctor thought that he grew paler for an instant, but it was difficult to be sure about that, because he was naturally pale

"Harrier!"

He glanced round the room, his small eyes gleaming excitedly Then he seemed to pull himself together He turned abruptly and held out his hand

"Doctor Hailey?" he asked, fixing his eyes on the doctor in the fashion often adopted by men of this kind

"That is my name"

Doctor Hailey's tones were not cordial

"My name is Evans I wanted to talk to you on a personal matter But that must wait now"

He demanded to be told about the tragedy Yet he scarcely seemed to listen when the facts were stated

"We must send for the police," he cried "We must ring up Scotland Yard at once This is a terrible business—terrible There is not a moment to be lost The murderer"—he turned suddenly to the doctor—"I am right in thinking that poor Harrier was murdered, am I not?" he asked in a sharp parenthesis

"I do not see that there can be any doubt on that score Had he committed suicide, the weapon must have been in his hand or, at least, near his body"

"Of course Quite so, I agree with you entirely" Sir Thomas's voice jerked He told his clerk to summon the police Then he went to the door of the room and shut it He turned the key in the door and came back towards the place where Doctor Hailey was standing He stood a moment gazing down at the dead face Then he raised his eyes and fixed them on those of his companion

"I asked you to come here this morning," he declared, "in order to tell you that I murdered this man You will do me the credit of confessing that the appointment was well timed"

The doctor started in spite of himself His huge shoulders

seemed to square as though he made ready to cope with sudden danger His lack-lustre eyes narrowed

"So!" he remarked

"You do not believe me Of course not I had expected that" Sir Thomas Evans laughed harshly and there was a horrible, crackling sound in his laughter "Nevertheless it is the truth There are ways of entering and leaving this room which are not apparent to a casual visitor"

He strode to the fireplace and stood in front of the fire with his sinister face thrust forward A smirk played on his lips

"So now," he continued, "I have set you a puzzle to solve As an amateur detective you will have full scope for all your talents, you and the policemen who will soon be here Meanwhile I propose to go out and have a bite of lunch"

Doctor Hailey took his snuff-box from his pocket He opened it with great deliberation and took a somewhat prolonged pinch His eyes continued to observe the little banker closely

"Harrier was one of your directors, I understand," he remarked in casual tones

"He was And a damned interfering fellow into the bargain For which reason I killed him" Sir Thomas emitted a chuckle which reminded the doctor of the sound made by broody hens He took a big gold cigar-case from his pocket and proceeded to light up

"My business," he remarked, "is one which requires a very high degree of courage as well as of imagination"

He picked up his hat, which he had laid on the ebony desk and put it on his head

"If the police want me," he declared, "I can be found at the Automobile Club"

He moved to the door The doctor saw his fat hand reach out to the key He awaited the click of the lock

Instead of that sound, however, he heard another of the man's formidable chuckles

Next moment he was looking down the barrel of a pistol

Sir Thomas chuckled again

"I have changed my mind," he said Then his voice rose to a shout as he cried "Put up your hands, you damned scoundrel!"

His pallor had given place to redness His eyes were glowing Doctor Hailey took a step back

"Up! and be quick about it"

The little man advanced across the floor holding his gun out stiffly in front of him He began to count, "One, two, three, four," in a peculiarly menacing tone of voice The doctor glanced about him and then, apparently as an afterthought, raised his eyeglass and screwed it into position

‘ Have the goodness to put that thing away,” he ordered in a quiet voice

His words appeared to startle the banker, for he stopped counting and stood still. Nevertheless he repeated his order that the doctor should put up his hands.

“ For what reason, may I ask?”

“ Because I tell you ”

Doctor Hailey took more snuff.

“ Is it not enough,” he inquired in conciliatory tones, “ to have killed one man?”

Sir Thomas chuckled once more. His chuckle became a laugh. With a sudden, swift gesture he flung his pistol to a corner of the room.

“ Good! Damned good,” he cried. “ Let me congratulate you, my dear Doctor Hailey, on the possession of a very pretty wit—a very pretty wit ”

He advanced with outstretched hand. He shook the doctor’s hand warmly.

There was a loud knocking at the door.

“ Ha! The police!”

Sir Thomas drew himself up. He went to the door and threw it open. An inspector and two constables were standing behind it.

“ Permit me, gentlemen,” he said, “ to give myself up as the murderer of that young man—that most foolish and interfering young man ”

He indicated the dead body with a sweep of his arm.

The inspector was nonplussed for a moment. He inquired if Sir Thomas was serious and was informed that he had never been more serious in his life. At a signal from him the policemen moved closer to the banker.

Late that evening Inspector Biles of Scotland Yard was shown into Doctor Hailey’s smoking-room at twenty-two Harley Street. He found his old friend deeply immersed in a volume of lectures by Sigmund Freud and had difficulty in avoiding being dragged there and then into a discussion of the Psycho-Analytic Theory as applied to the criminal world. He declared:

“ I have just seen Sir Thomas Evans. It is absolutely certain that he did not murder Harrier. He was in Hampstead at the time the murder was committed ”

The doctor closed his book and stood up. He was in evening clothes and looked, Biles thought, bigger than usual.

“ And yet,” he remarked in slow tones, “ I do not think that the worthy banker is nearly as mad as he pretends ”

Biles nodded.

“ My dear doctor, that is the conclusion I have reached myself

The fellow is shamming. What I don't understand is why he should wish to accuse himself of such a crime."

"Have you looked into his affairs at all? It is just possible, isn't it, that he may be attempting to cover one crime by assuming responsibility for another?"

"His affairs are in perfect order. The credit of the China Bank was never higher than it is to-day."

Doctor Hailey shook his head.

"In that case," he said, "I must confess myself entirely at a loss."

"I took him home," Biles continued, "and told his wife to summon a doctor. I explained to her that you had seen him shortly after the discovery of the murder and that he had threatened you. In the circumstances it seems best that he should be placed under medical control."

The doctor nodded. He asked whether or not any light had been obtained on the murder itself and was told that the police were entirely without a clue.

"Both the doorkeeper and one of the clerks are ready to swear that nobody entered or left the room during the whole period of Harrier's occupancy of it. It is just possible that they are lying, but somehow I don't think so."

Biles went away. Doctor Hailey sat down again and gave himself to the contemplation of the puzzle. But no flash of illumination came to lighten his darkness. He was about to go to bed when he heard his front door bell ring sharply. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece beside him. It was close on midnight.

He went to the door and opened it himself. A young girl in evening dress was standing on the step.

"Doctor Hailey?" she asked in breathless tones.

"Yes."

The doctor stood back to allow her to enter. She came in quickly and he shut the door behind her.

"My name is Evans," she told him, "Lady Evans. I believe you saw my husband at his office this morning."

Doctor Hailey invited her to enter his smoking-room. He closed the door of the room carefully and then indicated a chair. Lady Evans, he observed with interest, was very young and very beautiful—a pale blonde of the type so greatly admired by second-rate artists. Yet she did not look second-rate.

She sat down and raised her big blue eyes to his face.

"I have come to you," she said in low tones, "because I am in fear of my life. You will help me, won't you?"

"If that is possible."

The doctor raised his eyeglass and put it carefully in position in his eye

"I think it is possible" Her accents were quite matter of fact "You are a mind doctor and if you pronounce that my husband is mad no one will dare to dispute that opinion" She added after a moment, "My own doctor has refused to certify him, but he is not a specialist, of course"

"I do not think that he is mad"

He saw her start The natural pallor of her cheeks was intensified

"Oh, surely, after what happened at the Bank to-day! The detective from Scotland Yard told me" She shook her head in a queer, bewildered fashion which was attractive as the ingenuousness of a child is attractive Doctor Hailey took a pinch of snuff

"Will you answer one question—a personal question?" he asked in crisp tones

She nodded, almost as though she knew already what was coming

"Was the murdered man a friend of yours as well as of your husband's?"

"Yes"

"An intimate friend?"

"Yes"

"So that Sir Thomas may possibly have been jealous of him?"

Lady Evans studied the carpet for a few minutes with, apparently, most minute care Suddenly she raised her eyes

"My husband had sworn to kill Jack—Mr Harrier," she said simply

"And yet he did not kill him?"

The girl drew a sharp breath

"Didn't he?"

Her voice broke and a look of deadly anxiety came into her eyes

"He has sworn to kill me also," she said in a whisper

She jumped up suddenly and seized the doctor by the arm

"Oh, do this for me!" she cried "Please, because I am so terribly frightened"

Doctor Hailey persuaded her to sit down again After a moment she raised her eyes to his face

"I can trust you?" she asked in whispered tones

"I hope so"

"I have been very foolish anyway," she confessed "A year ago I allowed Jack, Mr Harrier, to make love to me We exchanged letters, terribly indiscreet letters My husband has found some of them"

She broke off and raised her hands in a gesture of helplessness

"Last night, without any warning, the storm broke"

Her eyes quailed. She drew a deep sigh which seemed to stifle her breath.

"He had invited Jack to dinner. Afterwards in the drawing-room he told us that he knew our secret and that he had decided to divorce me. The way he said it was so terrible that I begged Jack to protect me against him. Then Jack lost his head."

She paused. She closed her eyes as if that memory was still too harrowing to be borne. "They fought with one another."

She added in low tones "Jack was trying to find those letters when he was killed!"

Doctor Hailey bit his lip. "How do you know that?" he asked sharply.

The girl seemed to recoil from him. Her cheeks became deathly pale. She rose and leaned against the mantelpiece.

"I know," she faltered.

She stood, swaying a little on her feet. He thought for a moment that she was about to fall. Then she sat down again and covered her face with her hands.

"You have not told me all the truth about those letters," the doctor said in very quiet tones. He added "I think it would be well if you made your confidence a complete one."

"I cannot tell you all the truth."

Doctor Hailey opened his snuff-box and took a careful pinch. "The recovery of a bunch of foolish love letters which your husband had already read," he remarked, "would not have availed either Harrier or yourself much, since Sir Thomas was, no doubt, in possession of evidence against you of a more substantial kind."

He looked at the shrinking girl as he spoke. He saw her lips assent to his proposition.

"*On the other hand if the letters contained a suggestion of a criminal nature—*"

Lady Evans uttered a low cry. The fear in her expression was cruelly intensified. She raised her hand in a gesture which seemed to ward off some imminent peril.

"Jack was mad, crazy," she whispered. "We were both mad."

"I see." The doctor's tone had a grim quality.

"He didn't mean it. Oh, I know that he didn't mean it."

She began to weep. The profound silence of Harley Street late at night filled the chamber. Doctor Hailey put his eyeglass in his eye.

"It is very likely that he didn't mean it," he said. "But, all the same, when a man discovers that another man, his business partner, has been suggesting to his wife that it would be a good thing to get rid of him—well, he has some excuse for taking an exaggerated view of the danger threatening him."

He paused The girl did not raise her head

"Your husband may have believed quite honestly that you and Harrier meant to murder him"

Still she did not reply Doctor Hailey stood watching her with a look of pity in his eyes It was the old, bitter story of a woman's misplaced love the story, he reflected, which is the beginning and the end of human tragedy

"When did Sir Thomas find these letters?" he asked after a moment

"I don't know I thought at first that he had only just found them But it is possible that he may have known of them for some months before he went to China I remember that he scarcely troubled to say good-bye to me when he left for that journey"

She sighed again At that time, Doctor Hailey realised, she must have been too greatly thankful to obtain even a temporary release from her husband to care how he took leave of her Nor with her lover at her side was she likely to trouble much about his letters The thought of the banker faring forth, alone, with the knowledge of his wife's betrayal of him hidden in his heart was not a pleasant one

"Harrier apparently did not find the letters," he told the girl "His pockets were searched in my presence"

"I know that I managed to get that information from the inspector who brought my husband home" She broke off and then added "I was so terribly afraid because if the police had found them they would certainly have been read at the inquest to-morrow"

With an impulsive gesture she drew a bunch of keys from the pocket of her coat and held them out to Doctor Hailey

"I managed to get these to-night," she declared, "after the doctor had ordered my husband to bed They were in his pocket As soon as I found them, I rang up the caretaker at the Bank and said I was coming down I'm going there now because my husband may tell the police about the letters at any moment I am quite sure they are in his room at the office for I've searched everywhere at home"

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes had become bright It was difficult to realise that this was the woman who, a few moments before, had seemed to be the victim of a deadly and paralysing fear, the woman who had just lost her lover at the hands, as she believed, of her husband The doctor regarded her with a thoughtful expression which betrayed the process of his mind He had encountered her like before, often enough, but seldom so extreme an example of the type She was, he thought, selfishness incarnate, selfishness without a single backward glance or a single hesitation Husband and lover were no more than

dream figures in this restless mind, figures easily replaced and therefore scarcely to be regretted. Only her fears and anxieties for herself were real. If she could secure the letters and persuade some doctor to certify the little banker as a lunatic she would turn without a qualm to fresh excitements.

The telephone bell began to ring. He strode across to the instrument and lifted it. A moment later he turned to the girl with new anxiety in his face.

"This is Scotland Yard speaking," he declared. "Your husband has just returned there. They want me to go down at once."

Lady Evans' lips parted in an exclamation of delighted surprise. She succeeded in suppressing it.

"I was quite sure that he had lost his reason," she declared. She took a step towards Doctor Hailey. "You will certify him now for certain, won't you?"

He did not reply. He promised to come to the Yard and then set the telephone down. He turned to the girl.

"It is sheer craziness," he said, "this idea of yours about going to the Bank. I will take you home, on my way to Westminster."

She shook her head. "No. I can't risk that. To-morrow it may be too late."

The look of fear had crept back again to her eyes.

Doctor Hailey adjusted his eyeglass.

"Has it not occurred to you," he asked, "that such an action, at such an hour of the night, must arouse suspicion?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"What can they suspect me of? My husband hasn't been murdered."

"Exactly. And so to-morrow he will learn what you have done."

"To-morrow it will not matter. To-morrow he will be locked in an asylum. Besides, I am going away to the country to stay with my sister until this trouble has blown over. Once the letters have been burned I shall be safe."

She moved to the door. He opened it for her. In the hall, as he was about to open the front door, he caught sight of her beautiful face reflected in one of his mirrors. She wore the expression of a child, a mingling of wistfulness and innocence. He caught his breath in the realisation that there was no artfulness in that expression. Lady Evans was entirely sincere. He called a cab and handed her into it. A few minutes later he was on his way to Scotland Yard.

Biles met him and conducted him up the famous staircase to his own room.

"This business," the detective declared, "is the most mysterious

I have ever handled The man will take no denial that he murdered Harrier and yet it's absolutely certain that his story is a tissue of nonsense "

He indicated a chair and Doctor Hailey sat down

"At the same time, my dear Biles," he said, "there remains the fact that Harrier was murdered and that nobody either entered or left the room in which the crime took place It would seem to follow that only an individual with special secret knowledge of the building can be guilty After all, if one is sure of one's alibi, self-accusation is not a bad way of disarming suspicion "

He took a pinch of snuff as he spoke The detective shook his head

"We have absolute proof that Evans was nowhere near his office yesterday morning until after the crime was committed "

He rang a bell on the table and when his summons was answered directed that Sir Thomas Evans should be brought to the room

"I am most anxious," he declared to the doctor, "that his mental state should be fully reported on by a competent observer So far as I am concerned he seems to be absolutely sane "

Sir Thomas came striding into the room with brisk steps He recognised Doctor Hailey at once and greeted him in his eager manner He repeated nearly everything he had said in his office using almost the identical form of words

"The mystery remains," he concluded, "because it appears to be easier to suppose that I am crazy than to verify the precise statements which I have made "

"Such as?" Doctor Hailey's tones were crisp

"That there exists a trap-door leading from the room to the cellar "

Biles interrupted sharply "We have spent a whole day attempting to verify your statements They cannot be verified because they are untrue "

The little banker raised his hands in a gesture of resignation His face, for all the smirk which adorned it, had a sinister look entirely out of harmony with the character to which he seemed to be pretending But Doctor Hailey did not observe that expression He had stiffened in his seat and was gazing now, with horrified eyes, at the man's left shoulder Biles, who was watching him, followed his gaze But he saw nothing to justify it His eyes travelled to the banker's face He restrained an exclamation Evans who was also watching the doctor, had become livid

"My God!"

Doctor Hailey sprang up suddenly and snatched his hat

"Arrest him!" he shouted to the startled detective "Arrest him as Harrier's murderer "

Before the words were spoken he had flung open the door of the room and was already in the corridor. He dashed down the stairway with such violent haste that one of the policemen on duty came running to obstruct his passage.

"A cab. For God's sake," the doctor ordered him.

The man, who had seen him enter with Biles, hesitated a moment. Doctor Hailey pushed past him and they came to the yard together. The policeman blew a whistle shrilly.

"I didn't realise, sir," he apologised.

A cab appeared. The doctor jumped in.

"Evans' China Bank in Kingsway," he cried, "and drive like hell."

He flung himself back on the cushions. He could feel his heart thumping against his ribs. It was just the barest chance that he might be in time. He seized the speaking tube.

"Quick! Quicker for God's sake!"

The vehicle swung into Aldwich, narrowly escaping a collision with a big market wagon on its way to Covent Garden. It raced up Kingsway and stopped. The great wrought iron gates of the China Bank stood like grim sentinels in the empty street. Doctor Hailey sprang across the pavement and seized the bell-handle. He tugged at it. He shouted.

"What do you want?"

"Is Lady Evans here? Oh, for God's sake open quickly. It's life or death. . . death probably."

The gates fell part. He was back again among the dim statues in the entrance hall. For a moment, in the darkness, he lost his bearings so that he scarcely knew how to advance. Then his eye caught a gleam of light. He staggered towards it, he seized the handle of the door beneath which the light was shining. The handle rattled in his grasp.

"Locked!"

He cried out, and his voice echoed in the wide spaces above him. The caretaker snatched up one of the big roof-lamps. Doctor Hailey was bending with his ear to the door. He remained thus for a second. Then he called.

"Lady Evans! Lady Evans!"

There was no reply from the room. He turned to the man beside him.

"Your keys."

"It is no use, sir. The key is turned in the lock."

The caretaker's face was white. The story of the murder had evidently shaken his nerves. He pointed with a finger which trembled to the end of the key protruding from the hole in the door.

"Have you an axe—a bar?"

The man ran across the hall to his lodge. Doctor Hailey listened again. He thought he heard the sound of a light footfall on the marble floor. Then another sound reached his ears, a faint creaking as of an old wooden stair. He sprang erect and beat on the panels of the door with his hands.

"For Heaven's sake, he shouted, "keep away from the god from the steps."

He stepped back into the hall and then flung his whole weight against the door. But its stout panels resisted him. Biles' voice beside him made him turn sharply. The detective held an iron bar which he had evidently just taken from the caretaker. He thrust one end of it into the jamb of the door with the deft skill of a professional burglar. He threw his weight on the other end.

The door burst open with a loud cracking and splintering of wood.

The three men started back in speechless horror. Before them, standing on the topmost step of the throne on which the gilded god was seated, was Lady Evans. Her hands were clutched to her breast, tearing at it convulsively, her eyes stared and her face was white as the white marble of the floor. She swayed a moment, backwards and forwards.

Doctor Hailey leaped towards her. But he was too late. Before he reached the god, she had fallen.

He knelt beside her and put his finger on her pulse. Then he tore open her dress. As he did so Biles, who was bending beside him, cried out:

"The same wound, in the same place!"

Doctor Hailey set the girl's hand down. He rose and leaned for a moment against the table. His kindly face was furrowed by pity.

"What does it mean?" the detective asked in hoarse tones. He added: "This time, at any rate, it cannot be Evans because, before I followed you, I saw him securely locked up."

Doctor Hailey seemed to pull himself together. Very slowly he adjusted his eyeglass. He came to the back of the golden effigy and pointed to a tiny button protruding from among the richly carved robes of the deity.

"Observe," he remarked, "that if I wish to reach the button I must bend over the god."

He put out his hand as he spoke and demonstrated the truth of what he had said. Then he stood erect again and pointed to his left shoulder. Biles saw a number of small flakes of gold adhering to the black cloth.

"The effigy has been gilded recently, my dear Biles. It so

happened that I noticed a number of similar flakes of gold on Evans' shoulder at the Yard. And then I remembered the Chinese cult of Tso-fu, '*the god who executes judgement*,' and the fact that the banker has recently returned from a journey to the Far East."

He turned to the caretaker as he spoke.

"When was this figure placed here?" he asked.

"About a month ago, sir. Sir Thomas fetched it back with 'im from China."

Doctor Hailey went to the door and picked up the bar of iron which Biles had left there. He approached the god and set one end of the bar on the upper step of the throne, retaining the other end in his hands. He invited the caretaker to lean his weight on the bar.

The man bent forward. Suddenly, from the breast of the god, like a tongue of some horrid snake, a blade leaped forth, flashed in the lamplight and, while yet the cry of new amazement, with which he had greeted its appearance, was on Biles' lips, vanished again behind the heavy gilding.

The doctor set the iron bar down and pointed to the lacquer cabinet above the head of the effigy.

"Before he went to China," he declared in calm tones, "Evans found some letters written by Harrier to his wife in which that unhappy fellow went the length of hinting at murder as a possible means of obtaining the woman he loved. Last night the banker told the guilty pair about his discovery and threatened an immediate divorce. At the same time he seems to have let it be known that the letters were hidden somewhere in this room. In the circumstances it is scarcely surprising, I think, that Harrier should have ransacked every likely receptacle this morning, including that most inviting cabinet."

Doctor Hailey paused a moment and took a pinch of snuff.

"A second murder performed in the same way as the first and soon after it," he added, "is necessarily an immensely risky business for the murderer. That, I imagine, was why Evans sent me a telegram asking me to meet him here at midday to-day and behaved as he did. It was a part of his plan that we should be convinced that he had lost his reason, because such a conviction, or so he believed, apparently, would ensure his custody by my profession—supposing that the police rejected his self-accusation of murder, refrained from arresting him—while the second crime which he foresaw with certainty—was being committed. An alibi of that kind might be counted on to disarm even the blackest suspicion."

"But the button?" Biles asked. "I do not see how you connect that with the tragedy."

Doctor Hailey took a second pinch.

"My dear Biles," he said, "the priests of Tso-fu are wont to

exercise a strict control over the judgments of their deity. When the button is turned in one direction the spring which releases the knife is held back and the steps of the throne are quite safe. When, on the contrary, it is turned in the opposite way——”

He broke off and raised his huge shoulders

“Our friend Evans,” he added, “naturally kept his infernal machine at ‘safe’ till the day of vengeance arrived. His only mistake seems to have been that he forgot, or did not know, that fresh gilding is a little apt to rub off when one leans heavily against it.”

Archer Dawe

THE MYSTERY AT MERRILL'S MILL

By

J S FLETCHER

ABOUT half-past three o'clock of a spring afternoon in the year 1897, a well-dressed, somewhat distinguished looking gentleman, bearded and spectacled got out of a private brougham at a point immediately opposite the Otley Road entrance to Peel Park, in Bradford, and, after bidding the coachman await his return, walked on a little way and turned down Sydenham Place. A close observer, watching him intently, would have seen certain signs of mental uneasiness in this man's face and manner.

As he walked along, glancing at the numbers of the houses, he occasionally talked to himself in muttering tones, and now and then he threw back his head with a quick jerking movement which seemed to indicate distaste. Suddenly catching sight of the number of which he was in search, he turned abruptly to the door and knocked sharply upon it. A moment later a middle-aged woman, stolid and unemotional in appearance, opened the door a little way and looked at the visitor inquiringly.

"Is Mr. Dawe in?" asked the caller. Then without waiting for a reply, he added, impatiently, "If he is, tell him that Mr. Abraham Merrill wants to see him—at once."

The woman, without further delay, opened the door wide, silently inviting Mr. Merrill to enter. She stepped back, motioning him to walk into a small parlour on the left hand side of the narrow passage. Mr. Merrill walked in, the door closed behind him, the woman had gone away without a word.

Mr. Merrill took off his hat, and, drawing out his handkerchief, wiped his forehead. He made a hasty step or two round the little room, glancing half carelessly, half interestedly at its belongings. It was certainly a curiously appointed room, he thought. There was a solid writing table, littered with books and papers, in the middle of the floor space, a business-like looking bureau in one corner, there was nothing in it suggestive of comfort or indolence save one easy-chair. The greater part of the walls was lined with books. Mr. Merrill, having been in that room before, did not

upon this occasion make any particular examination of them. A stranger, left there alone for the first time, would have noticed, however, that this somewhat large collection of volumes related almost entirely to criminology. Crime and criminals formed the subject of almost every book. Crime and criminals, too, were suggested by the curious contents of a large, glass-fronted cabinet which stood above the mantelpiece. Within it, arranged against a background of black velvet, was stored a collection of gruesome objects, all ticketed or labelled, every one of which was a memento of some famous crime.

Mr Merrill was gazing at these things when he heard the door open with an almost imperceptible sound. He turned to confront Archer Dawe—a man who, after long years of service in the employ of Merrill and Sons, had retired five years previously on a modest competency, and had since given himself up to the one hobby of his life—the study of crime and criminals. Archer Dawe was now a man of sixty—a little, squat-figured man, who dressed, Sunday or week-day, in rusty black, was never seen, indoors or out, without a very high-crowned, wide-brimmed silk hat, and who wore old-fashioned stick-up collars, held tightly to his wizened throat by swathes of black neck-cloth. He was a notable figure enough, seen in this wise, and in company with a gamp-like umbrella which he always carried with him wherever he went, wet or fine, but few people noticed his garments when they had looked at his face. It was at most times more of a mask than a face: there was a high, bulging forehead, a small nose, a straight, hard line of a mouth, a square, determined jaw and chin. And deep-set in the general pallor of the face were two eyes—dark, inscrutable, steady as steel, with a curious penetrating light that seemed to burn far back in mysterious, unreachable recesses.

"Good-afternoon, Mr Abraham," said Archer Dawe, in a voice as steady and cold as his eyes. "It's been a grand day to-day, sir!"

Mr Merrill took a step towards his old employee.

"Archer," he said, without ceremony, "I want you to come down to the mill. There's—there's something happened."

Archer Dawe, still watching his visitor, nodded his head without speaking.

"You know our old engine-house," continued Mr Merrill. "You know it was built before either you or I knew the place, and that's getting on to fifty years since—well, of course, it hasn't been in use since we built the new one last year, and we decided last week that we'd pull it down. There's been workmen at it ever since, and this last day or two they've been excavating the floor because I've a notion of putting the site to another use. Now, this afternoon, just after I came back from lunching at the Liberal Club, my son Arthur came into the office to tell me that the men

had come across something in the floor of the old place Bones! Human bones!"

Mr Merrill wiped his forehead again Archer Dawe, statue-like in his rigidity, stood watching and waiting, his face expressionless

"In fact," continued the mill-owner presently, "they unearthed what was practically a skeleton There were some bits of what one might take to be flesh about it, but it was—well—you'll see it As soon as I saw what they'd come across I made every man that had seen it—there were only a few of them—promise to hold his tongue till I gave him leave to speak, and I had the place covered up, and left Arthur and the foreman in charge of it. I want you to come down and see it before we tell the police It—well, it puzzles me, Archer"

"Why, Mr Abraham?" asked Archer Dawe.

"Because, since that old engine-house was built by my father, it stands to reason that whoever buried that body there must have had access to it," said Mr Merrill, "and nobody could have had access to it but somebody employed about the place And I've been wondering all the way up here from Valley Road whose body it can be, and who put it there?"

Archer Dawe opened the door of his little parlour and took down an old overcoat from a peg in the passage, "I'm ready, Mr Abraham," he said, possessing himself of his umbrella "I expect you've got the carriage somewhere about, sir?"

All the way to the mill Archer Dawe talked of anything but the matter in hand He had been busy in his garden, he said, when Mr Merrill was announced, and he spoke with some pride of his prospects of early peas and potatoes From that subject he turned to politics, and was deep in a burning question of the day when the brougham, at its owner's orders, stopped a little distance from the mill

"I don't want any of the hands to think you're here for any special purpose, Archer," said Mr Merrill "There's some of them, you know, have a bit of knowledge of your liking to ferret into things We'll just stroll round in a casual way until we come to the spot"

Any one watching Mr Merrill and his ex-overlooker wandering about the mill yard would have thought that they were having a friendly chat about old times They moved here and there in an apparently aimless fashion, until they came to the dismantled engine-house Within its doorway young Mr Merrill and the labourers' foreman stood awaiting them

"Send those two away," said Archer Dawe, as they drew near. "Let's have the place to ourselves"

When the other two, at a word from the mill-owner, had gone, he and Archer Dawe stepped inside the old engine-house The

roof had already been stripped from the walls, the walls had been torn down to half their height. All around the bed in which the great driving wheel had once revolved the labourers had excavated a good deal of the floor space, at one point of these excavations a couple of packing sheets lay stretched across a cavity. Mr Merrill pointed to these and said, in a hushed voice

"There it is!"

Archer Dawe laid down his umbrella and went across to the spot indicated by the mill-owner's outstretched finger. His face was as stolid and unemotional as ever as he drew the packing-sheets aside. He gazed into the cavity for a moment, and then knelt down at its edge and peered more closely at all that was left of what had once been a living man.

Mr Merrill hovered in the background. A strong man, a man of iron will, a man of such strength of character that he had made himself prominent among equally clever men, and was at this time Member of Parliament for one of the divisions of his native town, he felt himself unable to look upon this grisly evidence of some long dead, unsuspected crime. He drew out a cigar-case, and began to smoke, watching the crouched figure in its rusty black clothes as it bent over the thing lying in the cavity.

As he watched he thought of all he remembered of Archer Dawe. The little man, always eccentric, always strange in his manner to folk who were not in his confidence, had entered the employ of Merrill and Sons just about the time that he, Abraham Merrill, had left school to come into the business. Archer Dawe had steadily won his way upwards until at last he had occupied a position of great trust. He had always been a quiet, reserved man, no one ever found him in clubs or public-houses, what he did with his spare time no one ever knew. But just before the time of his retirement a matter arose in the counting-house of the mill which required all the sagacity, all the untiring patience, all the pitiless insistence of a sleuth-hound to unravel. Archer Dawe, without a word to anybody, unravelled it, ran the criminal to earth, flung him out into the broad light of day, trembling and guilty. Then it came out that for years and years he had spent all his spare time in making a study of criminology, had watched and studied men, had compared, and classified, and analysed, and had invented a system of his own in the detection of crime which was soon to make his name a terror to evil-doers.

This was the man whom Mr Merrill watched with curiosity, and with a certain feeling of loathing as he kept away from the spot over which Archer Dawe was stooping. How could the man examine that dead thing with such cold-blooded earnestness? Bending over it, peering into its mysteries, actually touching it, fingering

it, as if it were some mere anatomical specimen, and he a professor holding forth to a class! It seemed——

“Mr Abraham!”

Archer Dawe had turned round from the cavity and was looking earnestly at the mill-owner

“Yes, Archer?”

“You haven’t such a thing as a magnifying glass in the office, sir, have you? One of those that near-sighted folk use to read by?”

“Yes, we have,” answered the mill-owner “Do you want it?”

“If you please, sir”

Mr Merrill left the dismantled engine-house with the alacrity of one who is only too glad to get out of a place in which he has no mind to stay

“I’ll bring it to you in a minute, Archer,” he threw over his shoulder

Archer Dawe kept his keen eyes fastened on his late employer until Mr Merrill had quitted the place Then, bending over the cavity again he whipped out a big coloured handkerchief from his pocket, snatched something from the thing which he had been inspecting, folded what he had snatched in the handkerchief, and restored the handkerchief to his pocket He rose to his feet and walked a few yards in the direction of the door. As he walked he whistled a bar or two of a popular tune

Mr Merrill came back with a reading-glass in his hand

“Will that do?” he said abruptly

“That will do, sir,” replied Archer Dawe “Just a moment, Mr Abraham, and I shall have done all I want to do”

He went back to the cavity, got down on his knees again, and made a show of using the reading-glass Presently he rose and drew the packing-sheets over the thing which he had been inspecting Then, walking over to the door, where Mr Merrill stood watching him, he said

“Mr Abraham, I want you to see that nothing is touched here until you hear from me As I see things at present I think I can tell you something by this time to-morrow Can you keep all quiet till then?”

“I don’t think there’ll be very much difficulty about that, Archer,” said the mill-owner “You mean that——”

“I mean that I don’t want a soul to enter this place until I give you leave to let him,” replied Archer Dawe “Have you got a man that you can trust—a man that’ll stop here all night and see that no one enters to find what is there?”

“Yes,” answered Mr Merrill, “I have Dick Rowbotham’s the man And after that, Archer?”

“Wait and see, Mr Abraham,” said Archer Dawe

Dick Rowbotham, night-watchman at the mill, lived in a cottage

in the yard, immediately opposite the old engine-house. When Mr Merrill and Archer Dawe had seen and talked to him they went away to the mill-owner's private office. Mr Merrill produced a decanter of whisky, a syphon of soda, and glasses. He motioned Archer Dawe to help himself and offered him his cigar-case. Archer Dawe mixed himself a drink and bit off the end of a cigar. He sat down, nursing his gamp-like umbrella upon his knees.

"Now, as regards this question of bimetallism, Mr Abraham?" he said. "Now you're in Parliament, sir, you'll no doubt hear a good deal said by members on both sides of the House. Don't you think that——"

Not one word of opinion as to what he had seen in the dismantled engine-house could Mr Abraham Merrill get out of Archer Dawe that afternoon.

The little man drank two tumblers of whisky and soda and smoked two cigars and talked of various political and economic matters, but said nothing of the thing that lay, an unearthen witness of the past, under the packing-sheets which he had just spread over at

Next morning, Archer Dawe, having eaten his usual breakfast of bacon and eggs, set out, the gamp-like umbrella over his shoulder, the tall, rusty hat on the back of his head, for the Midland railway station. There he took a third-class ticket for Ilkley. He was quite spry and active when he entered the train, but when he arrived at his destination and turned into Brook Street he had assumed the character of an oldish gentleman with a rather halting step and a very wheezy cough. And when he entered a barber's shop, for the purpose of being shaved, he had aged ten years since the previous evening. He had also developed the dialect of south-east Yorkshire, from which part, many a long year before, he had come to Bradford to earn his living.

"There's a gentleman named Mestur Oliver Wildsmith lives i' this here place, isn't theer?" he said to the barber as he handed over his twopence. "A very well-to-do gentleman—I ewsed to wark for him at one time, a many year sin'."

"Lives in one of those big houses up the Moor," answered the barber. "Aye, he's one of the big swells of the place, is Mr Wildsmith. Come back from South America with quite a big fortune, so they tell me."

Archer Dawe made his way to Mr Wildsmith's house—a fine stone-built villa standing in its own grounds and overlooking the valley of the Wharfe. His step was very feeble, and his asthma—carefully assumed for the occasion—very bad, as he walked up the drive to the front door. He looked a weary, tired old man in the eyes of the smart serving-maid who opened the door to him. He

looked still older, still feebler, when, after a brief interval, he was shown into Mr Wildsmith's presence

Mr Oliver Wildsmith, a solid-faced fleshy man of about Archer Dawe's own age, sat in the midst of mahogany and scarlet leather, writing letters. He stared at the queer old figure in rusty black

"Eh, dear, dear! Ye'll not remember me, Mestur Wildsmith, sir," said Archer Dawe. "I wor a hand at Merrill's Mill when ye wor t' heead engineer there—it'll be thirty years ago sin' you left us, sir! Benjyman Simpson my name is—many's the pipe o' 'bacca ye've given me in them days. Aye—I've left t' mill now, sir—I hev' a bit on a pension, like. I just come out for t'day to Eekla, like, and I heerd 'at you wor livin' here, sir, sin' you cam' back fro' South America wi' all that gre't fortune, so I says, 'Nay,' I says, 'I'll go an' say how-do to Mestur Wildsmith.' I'm gettin' an owd man, sir—aye, sure-ly."

"Sit you down—sit you down," said the man at the desk. "Dear me! one of Merrill's old workmen, are you? Aye, it's a long time ago, is that? Why, I'm past sixty myself. Here, you must have a drink. Benjamin Simpson, isn't it? Well, I don't remember you, Benjamin, but old friends are old friends. I've been out of England a good many years, so I haven't had much chance of seeing many yet."

He went over to a sideboard and came back with a glass of whisky and water for his visitor. Archer Dawe bowed his respect.

"Aye, I mind you well—well indeed, sir—theer wor you an' your brother Edward, as wor your assistant i' t' engineerin'. He wor a fine young feller, wor Mestur Ned—theer wor a young lady up Manningham way, 'at he wor varry sweet on. He went off varry sudden to Canyda, did Mestur Ned, didn't he, sir?"

The heavy-faced man at the mahogany desk frowned.

"Yes," he said. "He emigrated to Canada, did my brother?"

"An' niver cam' back to t' owd country," sighed the visitor. "Dear-a-dear! It's a strange thing, is life. I did hear, sir, 'at you married t' young lady 'at Mestur Ned wor to hev' married—but, of course, he never cam' back no more. I hope your missus is i' good health, sir."

"My wife is dead," said the man at the desk shortly.

"Is sha now?" said the visitor, in tones of deep commiseration. "Deary me! Well, it's a vale o' tears, is this here. But you'll have childer, no doubt, Mestur Wildsmith?"

"We had no children," answered Mr Wildsmith, still more shortly. "Here, would you like to smoke a cigar?"

"Thenkin' you kindly, sir. Ah, a deal of changes there is i' this life! Now, you wouldn't think it, sir, but do you know 'at they're pullin' down t' owd engine-house at Merrill's Mill?"

"Oh—are they?"

"Aye, and rivin' t' floor up an' all! Excavat' it An' it's a strange thing what they find under floors when they rive 'm up—it is!"

The man at the mahogany desk was sitting back staring in a strange, inquisitive fashion at his visitor. The visitor, shaking his old head from side to side, rambled on.

"Aye, the fun' a skellinton under t' floor ther' yisterda'—a reyt skellinton! Ye mus' ha' walked over that there skellinton many a time when ye wor engineer, Mestur Wildsmith! Did ye niver notice nowt?"

"I? Not I, man! A skeleton? Why, whose could it be—there?"

"Nay, ye're axin summat! But——"

The visitor was seized by a bad attack of coughing. He set down his glass on the edge of the mahogany desk and fumbled in his old coat for his handkerchief. But instead of using the handkerchief, he suddenly produced something from its folds and held that something, laid on the palm of his own right hand, before the other man's eyes. A human hand!—dried, withered, little more than bone—the second finger missing, and on the fourth a ring, of curious and exceptional device. And as he thus held it Archer Dawe, old and doddering no longer, spoke.

"Whose hand is that?"

Oliver Wildsmith half-rose, gasped, caught at his throat, fell—inert, limp.

Archer Dawe went across the room and rang the bell, rang it twice, loudly.

"Look to your master," he said, as the servants came running into the room. "He's in a fit. And send for a doctor."

Then he walked out of the house—walked swiftly, and with a strong man's determination, to the police-station and the post-office.

Moris Klaw

THE CASE OF THE TRAGEDIES IN THE GREEK ROOM

By

SAX ROHMER

WHEN did Moris Klaw first appear in London? It is a question which I am asked sometimes and to which I reply To the best of my knowledge, shortly before the commencement of the strange happenings at the Menzies Museum

What I know of him I have gathered from various sources, and in these papers, which represent an attempt to justify the methods of one frequently accused of being an insane theorist, I propose to recount all the facts which have come to my knowledge In some few of the cases I was personally though slightly concerned, but regard me merely as the historian and on no account as the principal or even minor character in the story My friendship with Martin Coram led, then, to my first meeting with Moris Klaw—a meeting which resulted in my becoming his biographer, inadequate though my information unfortunately remains

It was some three months after the appointment of Coram to the curatorship of the Menzies Museum that the first of a series of singular occurrences took place there

This occurrence befell one night in August, and the matter was brought to my ears by Coram himself on the following morning I had, in fact, just taken my seat at the breakfast table, when he walked in unexpectedly and sank into an arm-chair His dark, clean-shaven face looked more gaunt than usual and I saw, as he lighted the cigarette which I proffered that his hand-shook nervously

“There’s trouble at the Museum!” he said abruptly “I want you to run around”

I looked at him for a moment without replying, and, knowing the responsibility of his position, feared that he referred to a theft from the collection

“Something gone?” I asked

“No, worse!” was his reply

“What do you mean Coram?”

He threw the cigarette, unsmoked, into the hearth “You know Conway?” he said, “Conway, the night-attendant Well—he’s dead!”

I stood up from the table, my breakfast forgotten, and stared incredulously "Do you mean that he died in the night?" I inquired

"Yes Done for, poor devil!"

"What! murdered?"

"Without a doubt, Searles! He's had his neck broken!"

I waited for no further explanations, but hastily dressing, accompanied Coram to the Museum. It consists, I should mention, of four long, rectangular rooms, the windows of two overlooking South Grafton Square, those of the third giving upon the court that leads to the curator's private entrance, and the fourth adjoining an enclosed garden attached to the building. This fourth room is on the ground floor and is entered through the hall from the Square, the other three, containing the principal and more valuable exhibits, are upon the first floor and are reached by a flight of stairs from the hall. The remainder of the building is occupied by an office and the curator's private apartments, and is completely shut off from that portion open to the public, the only communicating door—an iron one—being kept locked.

The room described in the catalogue as the "Greek Room" proved to be the scene of the tragedy. This room is one of the two overlooking the Square and contains some of the finest items of the collection. The Museum is not open to the public until ten o'clock, and I found, upon arriving there, that the only occupants of the Greek Room were the commissionaire on duty, two constables, a plain-clothes officer and an inspector—that is, if I except the body of poor Conway.

He had not been touched, but lay as he was found by Beale, the commissionaire, who took charge of the upper rooms during the day, and, indeed, it was patent that he was beyond medical aid. In fact, the position of his body was so extraordinary as almost to defy description.

There are three windows in the Greek Room, with wall-cases between, and, in the gap corresponding to the east window and just by the door opening into the next room, is a chair for the attendant. Conway lay downward on the polished floor with his limbs partly under this chair and his clenched fists thrust straight out before him. His head, turned partially to one side, was doubled underneath his breast in a most dreadful manner, indisputably pointing to a broken neck, and his commissionaire's cap lay some distance away, under a table supporting a heavy case of vases.

So much was revealed at a glance, and I immediately turned blankly to Coram.

"What do you make of it?" he said.

I shook my head in silence. I could scarce grasp the reality of the thing, indeed, I was still staring at the huddled figure when

the doctor arrived. At his request we laid the dead man flat upon the floor, to facilitate an examination, and we then saw that he was greatly cut and bruised about the head and face, and that his features were distorted in a most extraordinary manner, almost as though he had been suffocated.

The doctor did not fail to notice this expression. "Made a hard fight of it!" he said. "He must have been in the last stages of exhaustion when his neck was broken!"

"My dear fellow!" cried Coram, somewhat irritably, "what do you mean when you say that he made a hard fight? There could not possibly have been any one else in these rooms last night!"

"Excuse me, sir!" said the inspector, "but there certainly was something going on here. Have you seen the glass case in the next room?"

"Glass case?" muttered Coram, running his hand distractedly through his thick black hair. "No, what of a glass case?"

"In here, sir," explained the inspector, leading the way into the adjoining apartment.

At his words, we all followed and found that he referred to the glass front of a wall-case containing statuettes and images of Egyptian deities. The centre pane of this was smashed into fragments, the broken glass strewing the floor and the shelves inside the case.

"That looks like a struggle, sir, doesn't it?" said the inspector.

"Heaven help us! What does it mean?" groaned poor Coram. "Who could possibly have gained access to the building in the night, or, having done so, have quitted it again, when all the doors remained locked?"

"That we must try and find out!" replied the inspector. "Meanwhile, here are his keys. They lay on the floor in a corner of the Greek Room."

Coram took them, mechanically. "Beale," he said to the commissioner, "see if any of the cases are unlocked."

The man proceeded to go around the rooms. He had progressed no further than the Greek Room when he made a discovery. "Here's the top of this unfastened, sir!" he suddenly cried excitedly.

We hurriedly joined him, to find that he stood before a marble pedestal surmounted by a thick glass case containing what Coram had frequently assured me was the gem of the collection—the Athenian Harp.

It was alleged to be of very ancient Greek workmanship, and was constructed of fine gold, inlaid with jewels. It represented two reclining female figures—their arms thrown above their heads, their hands meeting, and several of the strings which were still intact were of incredibly fine gold wire. The instrument was said to have

belonged to a Temple of Pallas in an extremely remote age, and at the time it was brought to light, much controversy had waged concerning its claims to authenticity, several connoisseurs proclaiming it the work of a famous goldsmith of mediæval Florence, and nothing but a clever forgery. However, Greek or Florentine, amazingly ancient or comparatively modern, it was a beautiful piece of workmanship and of very great intrinsic value, apart from its artistic worth and unique character.

"I thought so!" said the plain-clothes man. "A clever museum thief!"

Coram sighed wearily. "My good fellow," he replied, "can you explain, by any earthly hypothesis, how a man could get into these apartments and leave them again, during the night?"

"Regarding that, sir," remarked the detective, "there are a few questions I should like to ask you. In the first place, at what time does the Museum close?"

"At six o'clock in the summer."

"What do you do when the last visitor has gone?"

"Having locked the outside door, Beale, here, thoroughly examines every room to make certain that no one remains concealed. He next locks the communicating doors and comes down into the hall. It was then his custom to hand me the keys. I gave them into poor Conway's keeping when he came on duty at half-past six, and every hour he went through the Museum, relocking all the doors behind him."

"I understand that there is a tell-tale watch in each room?"

"Yes. That in the Greek Room registers four a.m., so that it was about then that he met his death. He had evidently opened the door communicating with the next room—that containing the broken glass-case, but he did not touch the detector and the door was found open this morning."

"Some one must have lain concealed there and sprung upon him as he entered."

"Impossible! There is no other means of entrance or exit. The three windows are iron-barred and they have not been tampered with. Moreover, the watch shows that he was there at three o'clock and nothing larger than a mouse could find shelter in the place, there is nowhere a man could hide."

"Then the murderer followed him into the Greek Room?"

"Might I venture to point out that, had he done so, he would have been there this morning when Beale arrived? The door of the Greek Room was locked and the keys were found inside upon the floor!"

"The thief might have had a duplicate set."

"Quite impossible, but, granting the impossible, how did he get in, since the hall door was bolted and barred?"

"We must assume that he succeeded in concealing himself before the Museum was closed "

"The assumption is not permissible, in view of the fact that Beale and I both examined the rooms last night prior to handing the keys to Conway. However, again granting the impossible, how did he get out?"

The Scotland Yard man removed his hat and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief "I must say, sir, it is a very strange thing," he said, "but how about the iron door here?"

"It leads to my own apartments I, alone, hold a key It is locked "

A brief examination served to show that exit from any of the barred windows was impossible

"Well, sir," said the detective, "if the man had keys he could have come down into the hall and the lower room "

"Step down and look," was Coram's invitation

The windows of the room on the ground floor were also heavily protected, and it was easy to see that none of them had been opened

"Upon my word," exclaimed the inspector, "it's uncanny! He couldn't have gone out by the hall door, because you say it was bolted and barred on the inside "

"It was," replied Coram

"One moment, sir, interrupted the plain-clothes man "If that was so, how did you get in this morning?"

"It was Beale's custom," said Coram, "to come around by the private entrance to my apartments We then entered the Museum together by the iron door into the Greek Room and relieved Conway of the keys There are several little matters to be attended to in the morning before admitting the public, and the other door is never unlocked before ten o'clock "

"Did you lock the door behind you when you came through this morning?"

"Immediately on finding poor Conway "

"Could any one have come through this door in the night, provided he had a duplicate key?"

"No There is a bolt on the private side "

"And you were in your rooms all last night?"

"From twelve o'clock, yes "

The police looked at one another silently, then the inspector gave an embarrassed laugh "Frankly, sir," he said "I'm completely puzzled!"

We passed upstairs again and Coram turned to the doctor "Anything else to report about poor Conway?" he asked

"His face is all cut by the broken glass and he seems to have had a desperate struggle, although, curiously enough, his body bears no other marks of violence The direct cause of death was, of course, a broken neck "

"And how should you think he came by it?"

"I should say that he was hurled upon the floor by an opponent possessing more than ordinary strength!"

Thus the physician was about to depart when there came a knocking upon the iron door

"It is Hilda," said Coram, slipping the key in the lock—"my daughter," he added, turning to the detective

II

THE heavy door swinging open, there entered Hilda Coram, a slim, classical figure, with the regular features of her father and the pale gold hair of her dead mother. She looked unwell, and stared about her apprehensively

"Good-morning, Mr Searles," she greeted me "Is it not dreadful about poor Conway!"—and then glanced at Coram. I saw that she held a card in her hand "Father, there is such a singular old man asking to see you"

She handed the card to Coram, who in turn passed it to me. It was that of Douglas Glade of the *Daily Cable*, and had written upon it in Glade's hand the words—

To introduce Mr Morris Klaw

"I suppose it is all right if Mr Glade vouches for him," said Coram "But does anybody here know Morris Klaw?"

"I do," replied the Scotland Yard man, smiling shortly "He's an antique dealer or something of the kind, got a ramshackle old place by Wapping Old Stairs—sort of a cross between Jamrach's and a rag shop. He's lately been hanging about the Central Criminal Court a lot. Seems to fancy his luck as an amateur investigator. He's certainly smart," he added grudgingly, "but cranky"

Shortly afterwards entered a strange figure. It was that of a tall man, who stooped, so that his apparent height was diminished. A very old man, who carried his many years lightly, or a younger man prematurely aged. None could say which. His skin had the hue of dirty vellum, and his hair, his shaggy brows, his scanty beard was so toneless as to defy classification in terms of colour. He wore an archaic brown bowler, smart, gild-rimmed pince-nez and a black silk muffler. A long, caped black cloak completely enveloped the stooping figure, from beneath its mud-spattered edge peeped long-toed continental boots.

He removed his hat

"Good-morning, Mr Coram," he said. His voice reminded me

of the distant rumbling of empty casks, his accent was wholly indescribable "Good-morning" (to the detective), "Mr Grimsby Good-morning, Mr Searles Your friend, Mr Glade, tells me I shall find you here Good-morning, Inspector To Miss Coram I already have said good-morning "

From the lining of the flat-topped hat he took out one of those small cylindrical scent-sprays and played its contents upon his high, bald brow An odour of verbenia filled the air He replaced the spray in the hat, the hat upon his scantily thatched crown

"There is here a smell of dead men!" he explained

I turned aside to hide my smiles, so grotesque was my first impression of the amazing individual known as Moris Klaw

"Mr Coram," he continued, "I am an old fool who sometimes has wise dreams Crime has been the hobby of a busy life I have seen crime upon the Gold Coast, where the black fever it danced in the air above the murdered one like a lingering soul, and I have seen blood flow in Arctic Lapland, where it was frozen up into red ice almost before it left the veins Have I your permit to see if I can help?"

All of us, the police included, were strangely impressed now

"Certainly," said Coram, "will you step this way?"

Moris Klaw bent over the dead man

"You have moved him!" he said sharply

It was explained that this had been for the purpose of a medical examination He nodded absently With the aid of a large magnifying-glass he was scrutinizing poor Conway He examined his hair, his eyes, his hands, his finger-nails He rubbed long, flexible fingers upon the floor beside the body—and sniffed at the dust

"Some one so kindly will tell me all about it," he said, turning out the dead man's pockets

Coram briefly recounted much of the foregoing, and replied to the oddly chosen questions which from time to time Moris Klaw put to him Throughout the duologue, the singular old man conducted a detailed search of every square inch, I think, of the Greek Room Before the case containing the harp he stood, peering

"It is here that the trouble centres," he muttered "What do I know of such a Grecian instrument? Let me think "

He threw back his head, closing his eyes

"Such valuable curios," he rumbled, "have histories—and the crimes they occasion operate in cycles" He waved his hand in a slow circle "If I but knew the history of this harp! Mr Coram!"

He glanced towards my friend

"Thoughts are things, Mr Coram If I might spend a night here—upon the very spot of floor where the poor Conway fell—I could from the surrounding atmosphere (it is a sensitive plate)

recover a picture of the thing in his mind"—indicating Conway—"at the last!"

The Scotland Yard man blew down his nose

"You snort, my friend," said Moris Klaw, turning upon him "You would snort less if you had waked screaming, out in the desert, screaming out with fear of the dripping beaks of the vultures—the last, dreadful fear which the mind had known of him who had died of thirst upon that haunted spot!"

The words and the manner of their delivery thrilled us all

"What is it," continued the weird old man, "but the odic force, the ether—say it how you please—which carries the wireless message, the lightning? It is a huge, subtle, sensitive plate Inspiration, what you call bad luck and good luck—all are but reflections from it The supreme thought preceding death is imprinted on the surrounding atmosphere like a photograph I have trained this"—he tapped his brow—"to reproduce those photographs! May I sleep here to-night, Mr Coram?"

Somewhere beneath the ramshackle exterior we had caught a glimpse of a man of power From behind the thick pebbles momentarily had shone out the light of a tremendous and original mind

"I should be most glad of your assistance," answered my friend

"No police must be here to-night," rumbled Moris Klaw "No heavy-footed constables, filling the room with thoughts of large cooks and small Besses, must fog my negative!"

"Can that be arranged?" asked Coram of the inspector

"The men on duty can remain in the hall, if you wish it, sir"

"Good!" rumbled Moris Klaw

He moistened his brow with verberna, bowed uncouthly, and shuffled from the Greek Room

III

MORIS KLAU reappeared in the evening, accompanied by a strikingly beautiful brunette

The change of face upon the part of Mr Grimsby, of New Scotland Yard, was singular

"My daughter—Isis," explained Moris Klaw "She assists to develop my negatives"

Grimsby became all attention Leaving two men on duty in the hall, Moris Klaw, his daughter, Grimsby, Coram and I went up to the Greek Room Its darkness was relieved by a single lamp

"I've had the stones in the Athenian Harp examined by a lapidary," said Coram "It occurred to me that they might have been removed and paste substituted It was not so, however"

"No," rumbled Klaw "I thought of that, too No visitors have been admitted here during the day?"

"The Greek Room has been closed"

'It is well, Mr Coram Let no one disturb me until my daughter comes in the morning"

Isis Klaw placed a red silk cushion upon the spot where the dead man had lain

"Some pillows and a blanket, Mr Klaw?" suggested the suddenly attentive Mr Grimsby

"I thank you, no," was the reply "They would be saturated with alien impressions My cushion it is odically sterilized! The 'etheric storm' created by Conway's last mental emotion reaches my brain unpolluted Good-night, gentlemen Good-night, Isis!"

We withdrew, leaving Moris Klaw to his ghostly vigil

"I suppose Mr Klaw is quite trustworthy?" whispered Coram to the detective

"Oh, undoubtedly!" was the reply "In any case, he can do no harm My men will be on duty downstairs here all night"

"Do you speak of my father, Mr Grimsby?" came a soft, thrilling voice.

Grimsby turned—and met the flashing black eyes of Isis Klaw

"I was assuring Mr Coram," he answered readily, "that Mr Klaw's methods have several times proved successful!"

"Several times!" she cried scornfully "What! has he ever failed?"

Her accent was certainly French, I determined, her voice, her entire person, as certainly charming—to which the detective's manner bore witness

"I'm afraid I'm not familiar with all his cases, miss," he said "Can I call you a cab?"

"I thank you, no" She rewarded him with a dazzling smile "Good-night"

Coram opened the doors of the Museum, and she passed out Leaving the men on duty in the hall, Coram and I shortly afterwards also quitted the Museum by the main entrance, in order to avoid disturbing Moris Klaw by using the curator's private door

To my friend's study, Hilda Coram brought us coffee She was unnaturally pale, and her eyes were feverishly bright I concluded that the tragedy was responsible

"Perhaps to an extent," said Coram, "but she is studying music, and I fear overworking in order to pass a stiff exam"

Coram and I surveyed the Greek Room problem from every conceivable standpoint, but were unable to surmise how the thief had entered, how left, and why he had fled without his booty

"I don't mind confessing," said Coram, "that I am very ill at

case We haven't the remotest idea how the murderer got into the Greek Room nor how he got out again Bolts and bars, it is evident, do not prevail against him, so that we may expect a repetition of the dreadful business at any time

"What precautions do you propose to take?"

"Well, there will be a couple of police on duty in the Museum for the next week or so, but, after that, we shall have to rely upon a night watchman The funds only allow of the appointment of four attendants three for day and one for night duty"

"Do you think you'll find any difficulty in getting a man?"

"No," replied Coram "I know of a steady man who will come as soon as we are ready for him"

I slept but little that night, and was early afoot and around to the Museum Isis Klaw was there before me, carrying the red cushion, and her father was deep in conversation with Coram

Detective-Inspector Grimsby approached me

"I see you're looking at the cushion, sir!" he said, smilingly "But it's not a 'plant' He's not an up-to-date cracksman Nothing's missing!"

"You need not assure me of that," I replied "I do not doubt Mr Klaw's honesty of purpose"

"Wait till you hear his mad theory, though!" he said, with a glance aside at the girl

"Mr Coram," Moris Klaw was saying, in his odd, rumbling tones, "my psychic photograph is of a woman! A woman dressed all in white!"

Grimsby coughed—then flushed as he caught the eye of Isis

"Poor Conway's mind," continued Klaw, "is filled with such a picture when he breathes his last—great wonder he has for the white woman and great fear for the Athenian Harp, which she carries!"

"Which she carries!" cried Coram

"Some woman took the harp from its case a few minutes before Conway died!" affirmed Moris Klaw "I have much research to make now, and with aid from Isis shall develop my negative! Yesterday I learnt from the constable, who was on night duty at the corner of the Square, that a heavy pantechnicon van went driving round at four o'clock It was shortly after four o'clock that the tragedy occurred The driver was unaware that there was no way out, you understand Is it important? I cannot say It often is such points that matter We must, however, waste no time Until you hear from me again you will lay dry plaster-of-paris all around the stand of the Athenian Harp each night Good-morning, gentlemen!"

His arm linked in his daughter's, he left the Museum

IV

FOR some weeks after this mysterious affair, all went well at the Menzies Museum. The new night-watchman, a big Scot, by name John Macalister, seemed to have fallen thoroughly into his duties, and everything was proceeding smoothly. No clue concerning the previous outrage had come to light, the police being clearly at a loss. From Moris Klaw we heard not a word. But Macalister did not appear to suffer from nervousness, saying that he was quite big enough to look after himself.

Poor Macalister! His bulk did not save him from a dreadful fate. He was found, one fine morning, lying flat on his back in the Greek Room—*dead!*

As in the case of Conway, the place showed unmistakable signs of a furious struggle. The attendant's chair had been dashed upon the floor with such violence as to break three of the legs, a bust of Pallas, that had occupied a corner position upon a marble pedestal, was found to be hurled down, and the top of the case which usually contained the Athenean Harp had been unlocked, and the priceless antique lay close by, upon the floor!

The cause of death, in Macalister's case, was heart-failure, an unsuspected weakness of that organ being brought to light at the inquest, but, according to the medical testimony, deceased must have undergone unnaturally violent exertions to bring death about. In other respects, the circumstances of the two cases were almost identical. The door of the Greek Room was locked upon the inside and the keys were found on the floor. From the detector watches in the other rooms it was evident that his death must have taken place about three o'clock. Nothing was missing, and the jewels in the harp had not been tampered with.

But, most amazing circumstance of all, imprinted upon the dry plaster-of-paris which, in accordance with the instructions of the mysteriously absent Moris Klaw, had nightly been placed around the case containing the harp, *were the marks of little bare feet!*

A message sent, through the willing agency of Inspector Grimsby, to the Wapping abode of the old curio dealer, resulted in the discovery that Moris Klaw was abroad. His daughter, however, reported having received a letter from her father which contained the words—

Let Mr. Coram keep the key of the case containing the Athenean Harp under his pillow at night.

"What does she mean?" asked Coram. "That I am to detach that particular key from the bunch or place them all beneath my pillow?"

Grimsby shrugged his shoulders

"I'm simply telling you what she told me, sir"

"I should suspect the man to be an impostor," said Coram, "if it were not for the extraordinary confirmation of his theory furnished by the footprints. They certainly looked like those of a woman!"

Remembering how Moris Klaw had acted I sought out the constable who had been on duty at the corner of South Grafton Square on the night of the second tragedy. From him I elicited a fact which, though insignificant in itself, was, when associated with another circumstance certainly singular.

A Pickford traction-engine, drawing two heavy wagons, had been driven round the Square at three a.m., the driver thinking that he could get out on the other side.

That was practically all I learned from the constable, but it served to set me thinking. Was it merely a coincidence that, at almost the exact hour of the previous tragedy, a heavy pantechmicon had passed the Museum?

"It's not once in six months," the man assured me, "that any vehicle but a tradesman's cart goes round the Square. You see, it doesn't lead anywhere, but this Pickford chap he was rattling by before I could stop him, and though I shouted he couldn't hear me, the engine making such a noise, so I just let him drive round and find out for himself."

I now come to the event which concluded this extraordinary case, and, that it may be clearly understood I must explain the positions which we took up during the nights of the following week, for Coram had asked me to take a night-watch, with himself, Grimsby and Beale, in the Museum.

Beale, the commissionaire, remained in the hall and lower room—it was catalogued as the "Bronze Room"—Coram patrolled the room at the top of the stairs, Grimsby the next, or Greek Room, and I the Egyptian Room. None of the doors were locked, and Grimsby, by his own special request, held the keys of the cases in the Greek Room.

We commenced our vigil on the Saturday, and I, for one, found it a lugubrious business. One electric lamp was usually left burning in each apartment throughout the night, and I sat as near to that in the Egyptian Room as possible and endeavoured to distract my thoughts with a bundle of papers with which I had provided myself.

In the next room I could hear Grimsby walking about incessantly, and, at regular intervals, the scratching of a match as he lighted a cigar. He was an inveterate cheroot smoker.

Our first night's watching, then, was productive of no results, and the five that followed were equally monotonous.

Upon Grimsby's suggestion we observed great secrecy in the matter of these dispositions. Even Coram's small household was kept in ignorance of this midnight watching. Grimsby, following out some theory of his own, now determined to dispense altogether with light in the Greek Room. Friday was intensely hot, and occasional fitful breezes brought with them banks of black thunder-cloud, which, however, did not break, and, up to the time that we assumed our posts at the Museum, no rain had fallen. At about twelve o'clock I looked out into South Grafton Square and saw that the sky was entirely obscured by a heavy mass of inky cloud, ominous of a gathering storm.

Returning to my chair beneath the electric lamp, I took up a work of Mark Twain's, which I had brought as a likely antidote to melancholy or nervousness. As I commenced to read, for the twentieth time, *The Jumping Frog*, I heard the scratch of Grimsby's match in the next room and knew that he had lighted his fifth cigar.

It must have been about one o'clock when the rain came. I heard the big drops on the glass roof, followed by the steady pouring of the deluge. For perhaps five minutes it rained steadily, and then ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Above the noise of the water rushing down the metal gutters, I distinctly detected the sound of Grimsby striking another match. Then, with a mighty crash, came the thunder.

Directly above the Museum it seemed as though the very heavens had burst, and the glass roof rattled as if a shower of stones had fallen, the thunderous report echoing and reverberating hollowly through the building.

As the lightning flashed with dazzling brilliance, I started from my chair and stood, breathless, with every sense on the alert, for, strangely intermingling with the patter of the rain that now commenced to fall again, came a low wailing, like nothing so much as the voice of a patient succumbing to an anæsthetic. There was something indefinably sweet, but indescribably weird, in the low and mysterious music.

Not knowing from whence it proceeded, I stood undetermined what to do, but, just as the thunder boomed again, I heard a wild cry—undoubtedly proceeding from the Greek Room! Springing to the door, I threw it open.

All was in darkness, but, as I entered, a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the place.

I saw a sight which I can never forget. Grimsby lay flat upon the floor by the further door. But, dreadful as that spectacle was, it scarce engaged my attention, nor did I waste a second glance upon the Athenæan Harp, which lay close beside its empty case.

For the figure of a woman draped in flimsy white was passing across the Greek Room!

Grim fear took me by the throat—since I could not doubt that what I saw was a supernatural manifestation. Darkness followed. I heard a loud wailing cry and a sound as of a fall.

Then Coram came running through the Greek Room.

Trembling violently, I joined him, and together we stood looking down at Grimsby.

“Good God!” whispered Coram, “this is awful. It cannot be the work of mortal hands! Poor Grimsby is dead!”

“Did you—see—the woman?” I muttered. I will confess it my courage had completely deserted me.

He shook his head, but, as Beale came running to join us, glanced fearfully into the shadows of the Greek Room. The storm seemed to have passed, and, as we three frightened men stood around Grimsby’s recumbant body, we could almost hear the beating of each other’s hearts.

Suddenly, giving a great start, Coram clutched my arm. “Listen!” he said. “What’s that?”

I held my breath and listened. “It’s the thunder in the distance,” said Beale.

“You are wrong,” I answered. “It is some one knocking at the hall entrance! There goes the bell, now!”

The three of us, keeping very close together, passed quickly through the Greek Room and down into the hall. As the ringing continued, Coram unbolted the door and there, on the steps, stood Moris Klaw!

Some vague idea of his mission flashed through my mind. “You are too late!” I cried. “Grimsby has gone!”

I saw a look of something like anger pass over his large pale feature, and then he had darted past us and vanished up the stairs.

V

HAVING rebolted the door, we rejoined Moris Klaw in the Greek Room. He was kneeling beside Grimsby in the dim light—and Grimsby, his face ghastly pale, was sitting up and drinking from a flask!

“I am in time!” said Moris Klaw. “He has only fainted!”

“It was the ghost!” whispered the Scotland Yard man. “My God! I’m prepared for anything human—but when the lightning came and I saw that white thing playing the harp.”

Coram turned aside and was about to pick up the harp, which lay on the floor near, when—

“Ah!” cried Moris Klaw, “do not touch it! It is death!”

Coram started back as though he had been stung as Grimsby very unsteadily got upon his feet

"Turn up lights," directed Moris Klaw, "and I will show you!"

The curator went out to the switchboard and the Greek Room became brightly illuminated. The ramshackle figure of Moris Klaw seemed to be invested with triumphant majesty. Behind the pebbles his eyes gleamed.

"Observe," he said, "I raise the harp from the floor." He did so. "And I live. For why? Because I do not take hold upon it in a natural manner—*by the top!* I take it by the side! Conway and Macalister took hold upon it at the top, and where are they—Conway and Macalister?"

"Mr Klaw," said Coram, "I cannot doubt that this black business is all clear to your very unusual intelligence, but to me it is a profound mystery. I have, myself, in the past taken up the harp in the way you described as fatal, and without injury——"

"But not immediately after it had been played upon!" interrupted Moris Klaw.

"Played upon! I have never attempted to play upon it!"

"Even had you done so you might yet have escaped, provided you *set it down before* touching the top part! Note, please!"

He ran his long white fingers over the golden strings. Instantly there stole upon my ears that weird, wailing music which had heralded the strange happenings of the night!

"And now," continued our mentor, "Whilst I, who am cunning, hold it where the ladies' gold feet join, observe the top—where the hand would in ordinary rest in holding it."

We gathered round him.

"A *needle-point*," he rumbled impressively, "protruding! The player touches it not! But who takes it from the hand of the player *dies!* By placing the harp again upon its base the point again retires! Shall I say what is upon that point, to drive a man mad like a dog with rabies, to stay potent for generations? I cannot. It is a secret buried with the ugly body of Cæsar Borgia!"

"Cæsar Borgia!" we cried in chorus.

"Ah!" rumbled Moris Klaw, "your Athenian Harp was indeed made by Paduano Zelloni, the Florentine! It is a clever forge! I have been in Rome until yesterday. You are surprised? I am sorry, for the poor Macalister died. Having perfected, with the aid of Isis, my mind photograph of the lady who plays the harp, I go to Rome to perfect the story of the harp. For why? At my house I have records, but incomplete, useless. In Rome I have a friend, of so old a family, and one so wicked, I shall not name it!"

"He has recourse to the great Vatican Library—to the annals

of his race There he finds me an account of such a harp In those priceless parchments it is called 'a Greek lyre of gold' It is described I am convinced I am sure!

"Once the beautiful Lucrece Borgia play upon this harp To one who is distasteful to her she says 'Replace for me my harp' He does so He is a dead man! God! what cleverness!

"Where has it lain for generations before your Sir Menzies find it? No man knows But it has still its virtues! How did the poor Menzies die? Throw himself from his room window, I recently learn This harp was certainly in his room Conway, after dashing mad about the place, spring head downward from the attendant's chair Macalister dies in exhaustion and convulsions!"

A silence, when——

"What caused the harp to play?" asked Coram

Moris Klaw looked hard at him Then a thrill of new horror ran through my veins A low moan came from somewhere hard by! Coram turned in a flash!

"Why, my private door is open!" he whispered "Where do you keep your private keys?" rumbled Klaw

"In my study" Coram was staring at the open door, but seemed afraid to approach it "We have been using the attendant's keys at night My own are on my study mantelpiece now"

"I think not," continued the thick voice "Your daughter has them!"

"My daughter!" cried Coram, and sprang to the open door "Heavens! Hilda! Hilda!"

"She is somnambulistic!" whispered Moris Klaw in my ear "When certain unusual sounds—such as heavy vehicles at night—reach her in her sleep (ah! how little we know of the phenomenon of sleep!), she arises, and, in common with many sleep-walkers, always acts the same Something, in the case of Miss Hilda, attracts her to the golden harp——"

"She is studying music!"

"She must rest from it Her brain is overwrought! She unlocks the case and strikes the cords of the harp, relocking the door, replacing the keys—I before have known such cases—then retires as she came Who takes the harp from her hands or raises it, if she has laid it down upon its side, dies! These dead attendants were brave fellows both, for, hearing the music, they came running, saw how the matter was, and did not waken the sleeping player Conway was poisoned as he returned the harp to its case, Macalister, as he took it up from where it lay Something to-night awoke her ere he could relock the door The fright of so awaking made her to swoon"

Coram's kindly voice and the sound of a girl sobbing affrightedly reached us

"It was my yell of fear, Mr Klaw!" said Grimsby shamefacedly "She looked like a ghost!"

"I understand," rumbled Moris Klaw soothingly "As I see her in my sleep she is very awesome! I will show you the picture Isis has made from my etheric photograph I saw it, finished, earlier to-night It confirmed me that the Miss Hilda with the harp in her hand was poor Conway's last thought in life!"

"Mr Klaw," said Grimsby earnestly, "you are a very remarkable man!"

"Yes?" he rumbled, and gingerly placed in its case the "Greek lyre of gold" which Paduano Zelloni had wrought for Cæsar Borgia

From the brown hat he took out his scent-spray, and squirted verbena upon his heated forehead

"That harp," he explained, "it smells of dead men!"

Bill Parmelee

THE POKER DOG

By
PERCIVAL WILDE

Telegram

WILLIAM PARMELEE
WEST WOODS
CONNECTICUT

HAVE DISCOVERED ANOTHER CARD SHARP WHAT DO YOU ADVISE
ANTHONY P CLAGHORN

Telegram

ANTHONY P CLAGHORN
HIMALAYA CLUB
NEW YORK N Y
ADVISE YOU NOT TO PLAY WITH HIM

WILLIAM PARMELEE

Telegram

WILLIAM PARMELEE
WEST WOODS
CONNECTICUT
I HAVE PLAYED WITH HIM

CLAGHORN

Telegram

ANTHONY P CLAGHORN
HIMALAYA CLUB
NEW YORK N Y
THEN YOU DONT NEED ADVICE YOU NEED SYMPATHY

PARMELEE

Night Letter

WILLIAM PARMELEE
WEST WOODS
CONNECTICUT

MY DEAR FELLOW COMMA DONT YOU UNDERSTAND QUESTION MARK I
THOUGHT HE WAS ALL RIGHT UNTIL I PLAYED WITH HIM STOP THATS

HOW I FOUND OUT HE WASNT STOP NO HONEST PLAYER EVER HELD SO
MANY GOOD HANDS STOP YOUVE GOT TO COME DOWN AND HELP ME
EXCLAMATION POINT DONT FAIL ME STOP WIRE YOUR ANSWER MY EXPENSE
STOP

TONY

Telegram

ANTHONY P CLAGHORN
HIMALAYA CLUB
NEW YORK N Y

YOU DONT HAVE TO PLAY CARDS FOR A LIVING STOP CUT IT OUT AND TRY
SOMETHING ELSE FOR A CHANGE STOP I AM NOT COMING DOWN STOP I AM
A FARMER NOT A BLOODHOUND TWO EXCLAMATION POINTS AND ONE
STOP COLLECT

BILL

Telegram

WILLIAM PARMELEE
WEST WOODS
CONNECTICUT
PLEASE COME

MRS ANTHONY P CLAGHORN

Telegram

MRS ANTHONY P CLAGHORN
CARE ANTHONY P CLAGHORN
HIMALAYA CLUB
NEW YORK N Y
COMING

BILL PARMELEE

II

A NICE-LOOKING young man, dressed in clothes which whispered "country" to the initiate, descended from a train at Grand Central Station, and cast his eyes towards the roof "What an elegant cow-shed this would make," he reflected, "large, well-ventilated, and room enough to store a million tons of fodder I'd put the stalls there—right there—" and he nodded approvingly at the many gates through which travellers were streaming, "and I'd put up a silo in this corner. An indoor silo—never heard of such a thing in my life—but there's room for half a dozen of them I wonder whether I'd keep Holsteins or Jerseys?"

Six months ago Bill would not have reacted thus, but the six months had witnessed a decisive change in his character. He pushed through the gate, and glanced along the long line of ticket offices. "Great," he mused, "wire gratings and everything fine for hogs."

His ambitious dreams were cut short by the vociferous greeting of a citified couple.

"Bill!" shouted the man.

"Mr Parmalee!" said the young woman.

"I knew you'd come," declared Claghorn happily. "I knew you wouldn't leave me in the lurch."

"It's awfully good of you, Mr Parmalee," supplemented Mrs Claghorn. "We do appreciate it."

"I said to myself," Tony rambled on, "I said to myself, 'Old Bill will never go back on me. Not old Bill!' And he didn't!"

Bill favoured him with a glassy stare. "If Mrs Claghorn hadn't telegraphed, I wouldn't have lifted a finger. You got into trouble once, and I got you out of it. You ought to know better than get into trouble a second time."

"But it's not my trouble," protested Tony, "it's all on account of somebody else."

"What did you lose?" demanded Bill.

Tony grinned. "Everything but my clothes."

"And you don't call that trouble?"

Pretty Mrs Claghorn led the way to a waiting automobile. "We'll tell you all about it."

In the privacy of their nicely furnished apartment, the Claghorns unbosomed themselves to their friend.

"To begin with," prefaced Tony, "it isn't my fault at all. I tried to help a relative of Millie's."

"Millie's? And who's Millie?"

"That's my name, Mr Parmalee," admitted Mrs Claghorn.

"Oh, I see," Bill nodded his approval. "The name Millie suited her admirably."

"It's all on account of a relative of Millie's——"

"My first cousin," supplemented Mrs Claghorn.

"A young idiot named Ted Wayland——"

"Only he isn't a young idiot——"

"Nobody but an idiot would have gotten into such a scrape——"

"You got into a worse trying to get him out of it!"

"I sacrificed myself," protested Tony, "I acted like a hero——"

"Only something went wrong."

Tony straightened up with dignity. "That doesn't make me any the less a hero."

Bill broke into the conversation. "Suppose you tell me just what happened."

Tony nodded "To begin with," he started a second time, "Ted Wayland's a nice fellow I'll admit that even though he cost me a pretty penny"

"Ted Wayland," said Mrs Claghorn, "is a junior in college He does the hundred-yard dash in ten and one-fifth, he's number one man on the tennis team, and he played on the basketball five that won the intercollegiate championship He's an all-round athlete"

"Including poker," said Tony

"A boy must have some amusement," countered Ted Wayland's pretty cousin, "and it would have been all right if you hadn't taken him to the Himalaya Club"

"What's that?" demanded Bill The Himalaya Club, well named, was famous for the size of the games which took place under its roof

Tony hung his head "I suppose I did make a mistake," he admitted, "but I didn't expect Ted to lose his head They play for pretty big stakes at the Himalaya, but there's always a small game for the fellows who don't want to go too deep I expected Ted to stick to that At a ten-cent limit he wouldn't have lost enough to hurt—twenty or thirty dollars, maybe Instead of which—" He broke off

"Go on, Tony," encouraged his wife

"Well, somehow Ted managed to get into the wrong game He played with fellows I don't know, and a man named Schwartz stripped him clean"

"If Ted is a college boy," ruminated Bill, "he couldn't have had much money to lose"

"That's just the trouble," explained Mrs Claghorn, "at any other time he would have been safe But his father had just given him his year's allowance tuition fees, spending money, everything, in advance He lost every cent of it"

"He came to us," said Tony, "and threw himself on our mercy He didn't dare tell his father what had happened he would have been taken right out of college. It was up to us to help him"

Bill smiled "Something whispers that that was when you started to get heroic"

"Quite so," said Tony with dignity "I could have advanced him the amount he had lost I wish I had done it, because it would have cost me less in the long run But I couldn't forget how you slipped one over on that crook Sutcliffe when we were up in the country, and I made up my mind to follow your example"

"What?" gasped Bill

"I knew," pursued Tony, "that this man Schwartz wasn't honest He held too many good hands to make it possible for me

to be in doubt I decided to do just what you had taught me I invited him up here to this apartment, I invited in three or four fellows I could trust, and after Schwartz had been winning for an hour, I managed to substitute a prepared deck for the one we had been playing with "

"You mean you rang in a cold deck?"

"Exactly I had stacked it beforehand, and I had fixed things with the man on my right so that his cut wouldn't disturb the arrangement "

"And how did you do that?"

Tony permitted himself the luxury of a smile "After the deck was all stacked, I slipped the bottom card to the top Then Billings—he was the man to make the cut—cut just one card, and brought the deck back to the original order It was rather clever, if I say so myself "

"Very clever indeed," commented Bill, "so clever that it told any experienced gambler—Schwartz, for instance, or me—that something was in the air "

Tony's jaw dropped "I never thought of that "

"Go on "

"I had fixed it," said Tony, with rather less assurance than before, "for Schwartz to hold a full house three aces and two jacks I dealt myself just a little better a queen, and four little three spots "

"Which was nothing but robbery," interrupted Bill "When I took a fall out of Sutcliffe, I gave him a chance If he had played honestly, and drawn, he would have beaten me He didn't play honestly, and he licked himself You didn't give Schwartz a look in "

"Wait till you hear the rest of the story As I said, I gave him a full house, aces up I gave myself four treys Four of a kind beats a full house, you know "

"I have heard something to that effect Go on "

"The deal came out exactly as I had planned it "

"How do you know?"

Once more Tony smiled "I had marked the back of every card in the deck, barring only the five that were intended for Schwartz

Bill laughed "If you keep it up," he warned, "you'll land in jail!"

"Or in the poorhouse," interjected Mrs Claghorn

Tony felt it beneath his dignity to comment "Straker opened, and we all came in Schwartz and I stood pat The rest drew After a couple of raises everybody dropped, leaving Schwartz and me to fight it out We raised back and forth ten dollars at a time That was the limit, and we kept on raising as long as either of

us had any chips in front of us When we had used up our chips, we put in cash, and when that was gone, we put in I O U's

"Finally Schwartz called I laid down my hand four three spots I said, 'That wins, doesn't it?' Schwartz grinned and said, 'It doesn't,' and I'll be shot if he didn't lay down four aces!"

"What?"

"That's just what happened I dealt him three aces and two jacks He didn't draw, but when it came to the show-down, he held four aces and one jack"

"What happened to the other jack?"

"I don't know"

"Where did he get the other ace?"

"You've got me"

Bill laughed, laughed till the tears ran from his eyes "If that's all you learnt from me, I'll say I'm not much of a teacher!"

III

It was Mrs Claghorn who broke a protracted silence "When Tony explained to me what had happened, I asked him to let me examine the pack of cards

Bill nodded vigorously "That's the first sensible thing I've heard in some minutes What did you find?"

"Fifty-two cards"

"How many jacks?"

"Four"

"How many aces?"

"Four"

"One of each suit?"

"Yes"

Tony cleared his throat "I see what you're driving at, but it doesn't lead anywhere He couldn't have held out a card"

"Why not?"

"Where would he have concealed it? He took off his coat when he sat down to the table"

"How about his sleeve?"

"You could see clear up to his elbow."

"Did it ever occur to you that he might have slipped the card under the table?"

"His hands were never out of sight Straker watched"

"Yet a jack somehow changed into an ace"

"Exactly"

"Unless you believe in miracles, there must be an explanation"

"I haven't found it"

Bill frowned "Go on with your story"

"That's all there is With that hand, the game broke up Naturally it broke up"

"What happened next?"

"Schwartz went home No—before he left, he took the cards and showed us some tricks"

"A-a-ah!" It was a long gurgle of satisfaction from Bill "The tricks, I take it, were not particularly good"

"How did you know?" gasped Tony

"And Schwartz impressed you as being a bit of a dub You could have done the same tricks quite as well or better"

"How did you know?" gasped Tony again

Bill smiled "I was thinking what I would have done if I had been in Schwartz's place Yes, I am almost sure that is what I would have done And I think I would have said, when I was leaving, that I would be glad to give you your revenge some time"

"Schwartz did say that"

"We'll hold him to his word to-morrow night"

"I'll telephone him"

"But first," said Bill, "I'd like to see the cards you played with"

He examined them with care

"I'll show you the marks I put on them," said Tony

Bill shook his head "You don't have to I could see them ten feet away So could Schwartz" Yet he produced a magnifying glass, and scrutinised half a dozen cards with extreme minuteness

"I told you," said Tony, "that I had marked forty-seven out of the fifty-two cards You will find that forty-seven are still marked"

"Correct"

"I will swear that not one of the five cards I dealt Schwartz bore my mark"

"Also correct"

"Then you haven't found out a thing that I don't know already"

Bill laughed and looked around the room "You played in here?" he asked

"No, in the dining-room"

"A small room, I should say"

"As large as you will find in most New York apartments," said Mrs Claghorn

"Doubtless That sideboard, I take it, occupied the same position as now?"

"Yes But the mirror in it doesn't explain how a jack changed to an ace" Tony was becoming impatient

"I didn't say it did That serving table was in the same place?"

"Yes"

"And you used the table that is here now for your game?"

"No," said Mrs Claghorn, "it wasn't big enough We sent out for a larger table"

"With the result that there was not much room between the backs of the chairs and the furniture"

"There was no room at all In fact, one of the chairs was badly scratched the next morning"

"I don't see what you're getting at," fumed Tony "I've told you already that Schwartz's hands were never out of sight"

Bill laughed "Nevertheless," he declared, "I think I've solved your problem But I'll need help to go further with it"

"I'll give you any help you want"

"You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it"

"Then to-morrow——"

"Yes?"

"After you've telephoned Schwartz and a few of your friends to come up in the evening——"

"Yes?"

"Get out your car, take me down town, and help me pick out a dog"

IV

TONY CLAGHORN was a man of many virtues, but the list of them did not include patience When Bill first expressed his wish for a dog, Tony laughed, and tried to bring him back to the subject under discussion But Bill was not to be denied

"I've always wanted a dog," he said, "and it strikes me that this is just the time to get one"

"What are you going to do with a dog?" demanded Tony

"I don't know, but I want one"

"What kind of dog do you want?"

"I don't know"

"A big dog or a small one?"

"I'm not sure"

"Long haired or short haired?"

"I'm not particular"

Tony gazed at him in utter bewilderment "If you want a dog for your own pleasure, I'll be glad to buy you the best the market affords"

Bill shook his head solemnly "I'm afraid a pleasure dog wouldn't do at all"

That night Tony gravely discussed the question of Bill's possible insanity with his wife She laughed at him "Mr Parmalee knows exactly what he's doing," she assured him

"How do you know?"

"Woman's intuition"

"Humph!" Then Tony's eyes brightened "Perhaps he wants a bloodhound!"

"Perhaps"

The more Tony thought about it, the more right and logical it seemed. He was up bright and early in the morning, and with an air of having guessed Bill's secret, piloted his wife and their guest to a kennel on Long Island.

Bill glanced at the sad-looking canines, whistled at one or two, and shook his head decisively.

"Don't want one of them?" asked Tony in surprise.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Too mournful," said Bill. "Why, those dogs look as if they had lost their best friends. It would make me unhappy just to have one of them around."

Tony choked down his disappointment. "I take it you'd prefer a cheerful dog."

"I guess so," said Bill hesitantly.

Tony proceeded without hesitation to an establishment specializing in wire-haired fox terriers. "These are cheerful dogs," he announced.

The statement was almost superfluous. The terriers overflowed with the joy of living, filled the air with their clamour, and as Bill neared their pen, rushed to its side to leap wildly at him.

"Are they cheerful enough?" inquired Tony anxiously.

Bill nodded.

"Then we'll pick one out?" urged Tony.

Bill shook his head, and lowered his voice. "I'm afraid they're entirely too cheerful."

"But you said you wanted a cheerful dog."

"Yes, but only middling cheerful."

With the growing conviction that he was the victim of an ill-timed practical joke, Tony drove many miles to the domain of the Old English sheep dog, to the region of the Chinese chow, to the habitat of the Mexican hairless dog, the King Charles spaniel, and the Pekinese. Thence, stifling his growing impatience, he proceeded to the haunts of the collie, the abode of the Great Dane, the dwelling of the St Bernards, and the home of the greyhounds. He even crossed the Hudson, and penetrated to the wilds of Jersey, the stronghold of the Belgian police dogs.

Bill followed him about patiently, observed, whistled, occasionally patted a head or two, but declined to choose any dog for his own.

Three o'clock in the afternoon found the party, a little weary,

but thoroughly determined, at the store of a dealer in lower New York City Tony, thoroughly disgusted, had resolved to carry on until Bill gave in. The joke, he had made up his mind, would not be on him. But Mrs Claghorn, discerning traces of method in Bill's madness, was curiously silent.

Tony strode manfully into the store. "We want a dog," he proclaimed, "about so high, or a little higher—or lower. He must have hair, but he mustn't be too hairy. He mustn't be too mournful—and he mustn't be too cheerful, but we'd like him to have a touch of mournful cheerfulness or of cheerful mournfulness. Do you keep dogs like that?"

"No, sir," said the dealer decisively, "we drown 'em."

"By George!" ejaculated Bill, "that gives me an idea!"

Tony promptly found out that the idea involved a visit to the city pound, and wondering at the strangeness of Bill's humour, piloted the car thither. He wondered still more when Bill, in the short space of three minutes, selected a dog which he declared satisfied him in every particular.

"Look," said Bill. He whistled. The dog came bounding towards him. "Go away," said Bill. The dog moved off. "Sit down." The dog followed orders. Again Bill whistled. Like a thunderbolt, the animal leaped in his direction. "That's what I call a dog!" Bill declared.

Tony surveyed the curious beast with disapproval. The head was mostly collie, though adorned with most un-collie-like ears, the coat—what there was of it, for the animal had suffered from mange—was reminiscent of the traditions of the Airedales, yet the shape of the body was that to be expected in the ancient and honourable order of Irish wolfhounds. "What is his breed?" he inquired suspiciously.

Bill inspected his choice gravely. "It's much easier to say what his breed isn't. A product of the great American melting pot, a true cosmopolitan. I'm going to invent a new variety, and call him a poker dog."

V

AT seven that evening Bill went over his arrangements with the care which might have been expected of a stage director just prior to a first performance. The table—the same large table that had been used on the previous occasion—was in place, with the result that the little room was nearly filled by it. Indeed, Bill, easing himself into one of the chairs, found that a movement of less than an inch brought it into contact with the sideboard.

"I can get a smaller table," said Tony.

Bill demurred "This one is just right"

"It's altogether too big for the room"

"It's not too big for my purpose"

Tony watched Bill, closely followed by his newly acquired pet, edging about the table "Do I have to watch that mongrel all evening? He'll hoodoo my game"

Bill gazed affectionately at the maligned animal "Mongrel? Mongrel?" he echoed "Why, that dog has some of the best blood in the animal kingdom flowing through his veins!" He caressed the poker dog's muzzle "Hard life, old boy, when even our friends don't understand us"

"Humph!" snorted Tony, "if you hadn't taken him out of the pound, he'd have made a little trip to the gas chamber by now, and he wouldn't have a worry on his soul this minute"

"Do you hear that, old boy?" inquired Bill, "there's gratitude for you! He's only a man, so he doesn't know he'll have you to thank if he and that Ted Wayland friend of his have no worries on their own souls to-morrow"

"Thank him?" scoffed Tony "I hate the sight of him already"

It must have been in deference to that uncomplimentary opinion that Tony, upon returning from the near-by tobacconist's with supplies for the evening, found the poker dog nowhere in evidence. He was secretly relieved when the dog remained out of sight as Straker and Wayland and Chisholm and Billings and Schwartz trickled in. Such an animal, Tony felt strongly, would bring discredit upon his household.

He tried in vain to fathom Bill's plans as the poker game got under way, and progressed in the manner which Tony had come to regard as inevitable. Schwartz won slowly but steadily, Bill, playing cautiously, lost with the same regularity, and the remaining five, playing even more conservatively, barely managed to hold their ground. To Tony's horror, Bill showed himself an exceedingly bad loser. He swore vigorously when he failed to fill a four-flush, and revealed unsuspected heights of profanity when triplets, in Schwartz's hand, beat two pairs in his own.

At the end of an hour Bill was two or three hundred dollars in the hole, and had made every person present aware of it by calling repeated attention to the fact. He rose angrily, and raked his remaining chips together "I'm going to quit, I've got no luck to-night, and it's foolish to play when your luck's bad"

The players protested, but Bill was obdurate "This seat is hoodooed," he declared, and he indicated the chair in which he had been sitting, so close to the sideboard that its back actually touched it.

Schwartz, the lone winner, felt it incumbent upon him to be

gracious "If you think there's something wrong with the seat I'll be glad to change with you"

"Umph," grunted Bill thanklessly, and accepted the offer "I suppose now that I've left that chair, the hoodoo's left it with me"

His gloomy prediction must have been correct, for the remains of his stack vanished with unexampled rapidity He bought a second stack, to see it follow the first, and swearing loudly, rose to make the announcement, "I'm through"

Schwartz laughed "Stick to it, old man," he urged, "and your luck's bound to change"

"Next week, maybe"

"Perhaps in ten minutes"

"I've lost enough for one sitting," declared Bill

Schwartz persisted "You may win it all back on a single hand Listen I'll make you a proposition" He piled up a neat stack of chips "Five hundred dollars' worth of chips, you see? I'll sell them to you for four hundred dollars" His left hand had arranged the chips, his right hand, palm up, hovered eloquently above the table

And then an extraordinary thing happened

From Bill's lips came a piercing whistle, and simultaneously from Schwartz's right sleeve shot three cards, two queens and an ace They were visible for but a fraction of a second, for they flashed back into their hiding place with equal rapidity, but the men about the table had seen

Schwartz stumbled to his feet, and his hand groped towards his hip pocket

Bill held out a blue-barrelled revolver "Is this what you want?" he inquired politely "I slipped it out of your pocket when we changed places" At his side the poker dog, barking furiously, pointed a menacing muzzle in Schwartz's direction

VI

FROM a long and solitary interview with Schwartz in the privacy of a bedroom, Bill returned to the excited group around the table "Mr Schwartz has asked me to announce that he was playing just for fun He doesn't want your money, and I couldn't persuade him to keep it He has handed me the amount he took from Ted Wayland the other night—here it is, and he has given me what he won from Tony Claghorn, and in addition to that, he has given me all his remaining cash, and his promise to leave town And, oh, I forgot, he's given me his shirt"

"His shirt?" echoed Tony "What do we want with that?"

"It's worth looking at," declared Bill "You've probably never

seen a shirt like it." With a penknife, he slit the right sleeve from top to bottom. "Do you see? It's a double sleeve. When he wore it, you could look right up to his elbow and see nothing, but there was enough room between the inner sleeve and the outer sleeve for a little machine known as the Kepplinger hold-out." He dumped a complicated mass of elastics, pulleys, and strings to the table. "This is it."

Tony fingered the apparatus gingerly. "You may understand it, but it's all clear as mud to me."

Bill smiled. "I'll demonstrate." He indicated a metal shell, shaped like a flattened bottle without a bottom. "This fastens between the inner and outer sleeves. It's just big enough to hold a few cards. Now, when I pull on the string, a little clip shoots out into the palm of my hand, and gives me the cards I have previously fastened into it. When I let the string go, the clip shoots back out of sight again, and takes the cards I don't need with it. A very useful invention, the Kepplinger hold-out. It gives the man who wears it a chance to hold out five cards if he feels like it, it makes him absolutely unbeatable, and it's so simple that you can't detect it even when he isn't wearing his coat."

"You say that it's operated by pulling a string," said Straker. "We watched him as if our lives depended upon it. How could he have pulled a string without moving his hands?"

"By running it down inside of his clothes, by bringing it out through the seam at one knee, and by fastening the end of the string to the other knee. When he separated his knees, the hold-out shot out of his sleeve, when he brought them together, it disappeared again."

"It's all very wonderful," said Tony at length, "but I don't see yet how you tumbled to it. You had never seen him play."

"I didn't have to," laughed Bill, "you told me what happened. Try to reconstruct the scene in your minds. A week ago he played with you. Tony dealt him three aces and two jacks, and when it came to the showdown, Schwartz held four aces and one jack. There's only one possible answer. He had an ace or two in the hold-out before the hand was dealt, he exchanged one for one of the jacks, and he must have used a hold-out because there's no other way in which he could have done it."

"That struck me the moment Tony told me his story, and it struck me too that the moment the hand was over Schwartz was in a rather dangerous position. He couldn't walk off and leave behind a deck containing three jacks and five aces, so he picked up the cards, and showed you a few simple little tricks. He did them badly, because he didn't want you to think he was a sleight-of-hand artist, but he did them well enough to slip the fourth jack out of

his sleeve, and slip the fifth ace back into it. When he left, he said he'd be glad to give you your revenge some time. He said that because you had tried to cheat him, and he knew it, and because he knew, moreover, that you didn't have a chance in a million of putting anything over on him. At honest poker you might have won, but at dishonest poker you didn't have a chance, and he was willing to go just as far as you would.

"But Schwartz made one fatal mistake. For a few minutes the jack he didn't need had been hidden in the hold-out, and when I examined it, I found the mark of the clip on its edge. If Schwartz had been just the least little bit cleverer, he would have wound up his card tricks by tearing the pack in two, and I should never have been the wiser. But he didn't, and that told me what he had done as plainly as if he had written out a confession."

Through the buzz of voices, a few seconds later, came the sound of a rap at the door. "May we come in?" asked pretty Mrs. Claghorn. "The poker dog wants to go to his master."

Tony exploded into laughter. "The poker dog! The poker dog! After all the trouble we went to, the dog had nothing at all to do with the game!" He turned to his friends. "Bill insisted on getting a dog before to-night, so we drove over a hundred miles to find one to suit him, and we had to go to the pound to do it. And now that it's all over the dog hasn't cut any figure at all. Bill was just having a little joke on me."

"Is that so?" Bill was strangely serious. "I told you you'd have that dog to thank before the night was over. You don't seem to realise what he's done for you." He indicated the chair which Schwartz had occupied. "I wanted our friend to sit in that chair. There were six other chairs, and the chances were seven to one against I lost out on that, so I took the seat myself and got him to change with me after a while."

"But what has that to do with the dog?"

"Not much," confessed Bill, "only he was parked in the lower compartment of the sideboard, smack up against the chair, gnawing contentedly at a bone until I needed him. I waited till Schwartz's hand was palm up on the table at a time when I knew he had cards up his sleeve. Then I whistled, and that dog, that dependable poker dog, burst out of the sideboard, and made a dash for me by the shortest possible route—right between Schwartz's legs. Schwartz separated his knees, or the dog separated them for him, and you all saw what happened." He gazed invitingly around the table. "Are there any other questions?"

"No questions," said Ted Wayland, "but I want to tell you that you've earned my undying gratitude."

"And mine too," said Mrs. Claghorn.

"And mine too," said Tony

Bill rose with proper solemnity "There being no further business before the meeting," he announced, "we will all take comfortable seats and watch Mr Anthony P Claghorn get down on his knees and offer his humblest apologies to the poker dog"

THE FOURTH DEGREE

By

F BRITTEN AUSTIN

SEBRIGHT of Scotland Yard sat in our office. He had dropped in, as he often did, unofficially, for a friendly yarn. "Unpleasant business round at the Foreign Office this morning, Q Q," he remarked, as he helped himself to one of the excellent cigarettes which the Chief, though a rigid non-smoker himself, kept hospitably for his visitors. "I suppose you've heard?"

Q Q raised his eyebrows.

"No," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Arbuthnot shot himself."

"Arbuthnot?—Shot himself?" The Chief's voice was at once startled and incredulous.

"Yep." Sebright nodded casually, and then savoured again the aroma of the cigarette between his fingers. "First-rate brand these of yours, Quayne. Where do you get 'em?"

Mr Quayne ignored this cold-bloodedly irrelevant question. He leaned forward across his desk in a curious sudden alertness of expression that in any other man I should have called excitement. But Q Q was never excited. Merely that ice-cold brain of his, at the appropriate stimulus, could function with lightning rapidity, leap from analysis to synthesis, from clue to hypothesis, from a seeming normality to the perception of a hidden crime with a swift accuracy that left me, despite his painstaking training, always bewildered. In this case, he had some reason for interest beyond the ordinary. Old Mr Arbuthnot of the Foreign Office had sat in this room only yesterday.

"My dear Sebright," he said in a tone that made that gentleman look up, "are you quite sure?"

Sebright nodded again, this time more emphatically.

"Sure," he replied, still professionally nonchalant. "Saw him myself."

"I mean—are you sure he shot himself?"

Sebright stared at him.

"No doubt about it. One of his clerks was passing along the corridor—heard a detonation in his room—opened the door and rushed in—and there was Arbuthnot collapsed in his chair at his desk—bullet-wound through the side of his head—his own

revolver lying on the floor, just as it had fallen from his hand. The clerk gave the alarm at once, of course. I was sent for—found nothing had been touched—clear case of suicide. The coroner's inquest may throw some light on the motive—no one at the F O could suggest any." He gave details with a curt definiteness finally disposing of a question that held no further interest for him.

The Chief pondered a moment.

"On which side of the head was the death-wound, Sebright?"

"The right-hand side, of course."

"You're certain of that?"

"Quite. You know his room—when you come in from the corridor, his desk is just to the left of you and he sits with his back to the door, facing the window. The wound was on the side of the head visible as you come in. I remember seeing it at once, and accidentally kicking with my foot the revolver lying on the floor. It was the normal right-hand side, right enough."

"H'm," Q Q grunted. "But not normal for Arbuthnot. He happened to be left-handed. It didn't occur to you to make inquiries on that point, I suppose?"

"Of course it didn't. People aren't usually left-handed." Sebright stared, startled, at Mr Quayne as he made the admission. "Why, you are not suggesting——?"

"Murder." Q Q uttered the word with a grimly succinct finality.

"But why——" Sebright still stared at him out of a sudden chaos of previously settled convictions. "What makes you jump to this conclusion? Who should want to murder poor old Arbuthnot?"

"My dear Sebright," Q Q's tight lips twisted in a faint smile, "only yesterday Arbuthnot sat in that chair. He had come to see me—privately—unofficially—and he was very much troubled. He was convinced that there was a leakage of secret information from his department. Arbuthnot was a queer old fellow, as you know. His one hobby, I believe, was the solution of acrostics and ciphers. He used to read solemnly through the agony-column of *The Times* every evening after work and puzzle out the code messages of all the illicit lovers who communicate through that medium. The evening before he came to me, he had a shock. One of the messages he decoded conveyed to some one unknown a piece of highly secret information that could only have emanated from his department. The poor old boy was in a terrible state—he did not want to go to his Chief with the news until he could at the same time indicate the culprit—he was, of course, like most Civil Servants in a senior position, extremely sensitive to the honour of his department—it was heart-breaking to him to think it should be indiscriminately disgraced. He came to me for advice. He was to have called again to-day."

"Phew!" exclaimed Sebright, thoroughly perturbed. "This

makes everything look different I wish to heaven he had come to see me about it at once! I hate these stories at second-hand—I'd give a lot to hear him tell me all about it himself!"

Q Q smiled quietly, rose from his chair

"He shall tell you, my dear Sebright You shall hear, in his own voice, everything he told me—and we'll see what you make of it" He went across to a cabinet on the farther wall, opened a drawer, returned with a long black cylinder "When a case is brought to me, I not infrequently allow my informant, unknown to himself, to tell it to the dictaphone at the same time I have found, more than once, a help to elucidation in listening to it repeated, precisely as it was originally told, when I am sitting here undistracted by his personal presence One can have the vital points reiterated over and over again *ad libitum*." He sat down to his comfortably large desk, slipped the cylinder into a concealed slot, pressed a button which uncovered a long aperture in the side of the desk towards the room, pressed another button There was a faint whirr of a mechanism started into activity, and then:

"One of my clerks must have taken an impression of my key——"

It was the voice—almost startlingly recognisable to me as I sat quietly at my own desk at the other side of the room—of Mr Arbuthnot It evoked immediately for me the image of that large-built man with a little pointed grey beard who had, only yesterday, sat in the chair where Sebright was now sitting Sebright jumped, involuntarily.

"My God, Q Q" he said, "it's uncanny to hear him like that! Just as if he were still here!"

Q Q smiled quietly as he bent down to the cylinder

"The needle wasn't quite at the commencement," he said "We'll let him tell his story again from the beginning" He made the necessary adjustment

It was indeed uncanny—even to me, accustomed to hear such repetitions from the dictaphone (Q Q did not use the usual ear-pieces, he had installed a loud-speaker to which he could listen while he paced up and down the room)—to listen to that dead man's voice repeated with lifelike accuracy in that still room It was a deep, solemn, booming voice, a voice that would have made a bishop of its owner had he been a parson, a voice that came vibrant with natural authority And that voice told the story all over again, precisely as I had heard it the day before from the man's living presence, just as Q Q had summarized it to Sebright The record concluded on the energetically-uttered phrase "*He shall confess, Mr Quayne—I am determined on it!*"

"Well, Sebright," remarked Q Q, as he stopped the mechanism

"What do you make of it? You have heard Arbuthnot's own voice "

"I don't want to hear it again " said Sebright, with a shudder "Shut the thing off It gives me the creeps Remember I saw that man lying dead this morning "

"Practise that imagination of yours, Sebright," commented the Chief with his grim smile "It's essential in this detective business Well, what are you going to do on this information? Anything?"

Sebright was thoughtful for a moment, evidently reluctant to open up again a matter on which he had publicly pronounced his official *dictum*

"Of course, he said, "Arbuthnot might still have committed suicide—in the distress, the sense of disgrace to his department, caused by his discovery "

"Do left-handed men usually shoot themselves on the right-hand side of the head, Sebright?" asked Q Q quietly "I knew Arbuthnot very well indeed I am prepared to ask that question at the coroner's inquest "

"That means a public scandal, Quayne—a lot of unwelcome limelight on the F O "

"I dislike private scandals even more," said the Chief "I regarded Arbuthnot as an old personal friend—and his murderer is certainly going to be found Remand that inquest, Sebright—and if we present the murderer simultaneously with the coroner's verdict, there will be no scandal There will be only praise for Scotland Yard "

"But how are we going to find him?" challenged Sebright, in exasperation "There's not the slightest clue The revolver is admittedly Arbuthnot's own—one he kept in his desk The clerk who burst into the room immediately after the detonation found no one but the dead man "

"Who was that clerk?"

"Oglethorpe—the next senior to Arbuthnot He was passing along the corridor—or so he says " Sebright stopped "Of course, he might have——"

"What?"

Sebright was suddenly illumined with a theory "Shot Arbuthnot with Arbuthnot's own revolver and dashed out into the corridor There's no evidence, one way or the other The corridor was empty People in the vicinity heard the detonation, but before they could investigate it, Oglethorpe ran into the room where the other clerks were sitting and told his story "

"H'm!" Q Q stroked his jutting chin "I know Oglethorpe How many clerks are there in Arbuthnot's personal department?"

"Six—including Oglethorpe "

"Do you happen to know if the other five were in the room when Oglethorpe entered it?"

"No There were only three—it came out while I was questioning as to who had seen Arbuthnot that morning"

"Who were absent?"

"Johnson—he was away looking for a file in the Registry"

Q Q nodded

"And the other man?"

"D'Arcy Vaughan—the next in seniority to Oglethorpe He was out at lunch"

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite He went to lunch at twelve o'clock as usual The tragedy occurred at ten minutes past I saw him when he returned—gave him the first news of it No, Q Q!"—Sebright thumped his fist on his knee in emphasis—"if Arbuthnot was murdered—it could only have been done by Oglethorpe!"

"Why?" Q Q lifted his grey eyebrows

"On his own showing he dashed into that room immediately *after* the detonation If the murderer were some one else, he must still have been there! He could not possibly have got away"

"H'm!" Q Q grunted "I know Arbuthnot's room pretty well I seem to remember that it has a large cupboard where Arbuthnot used to hang his overcoat Allow yourself to consider another hypothesis The murderer, hearing Oglethorpe come to the door, might have slipped into that cupboard and dodged out again immediately Oglethorpe had gone to give the alarm"

"Might!" echoed Sebright contemptuously "All sorts of things *might* happen I consider possibilities only after I've dealt with certainties What is certain is that one of Arbuthnot's confidential clerks was passing out information, that Arbuthnot knew of it and was trying to discover the source of leakage—*did* discover it, perhaps, that Oglethorpe had, next to Arbuthnot himself, the easiest access to secret information, that if Arbuthnot was left-handed he did not shoot himself, and that Oglethorpe was admittedly in the room so soon after the murder that no murderer could have escaped from it—unless it were Oglethorpe himself, with his plausible story of hearing the shot while passing the door and then discovering the suicide" Sebright rose briskly to his feet "I'm going to check up Mr Oglethorpe a little, Q Q," he concluded "And, unless my intuition is much at fault, Mr Oglethorpe is going to sleep in a police-cell to-night"

Q Q smiled at him

"That intuition of yours is positively uncanny, Sebright," he said "You may be quite right, of course It may just as well be Oglethorpe as another That it was one of Arbuthnot's own clerks who murdered him, I feel certain Do you mind me doing

a little investigation of my own? It won't conflict with yours, and I have a personal interest in the matter"

"You can do what you like—so long as you don't scare away the game," replied Sebright magnanimously. He glanced at his watch. "I'm going to get busy—and I'll let you know directly I slip my handcuffs on the man"

Q Q smiled again

"I'll do the same by you, Sebright," he said. "Well, the best of luck to you!"

The moment the door had closed behind Sebright's back the Chief took up the telephone, asked for a number

"Hallo! Yes—put me through to Mr Oglethorpe, please. Is that Mr Oglethorpe speaking? Good. This is Quentin Quayne—of the Q Q Agency. Could you manage to snatch a few minutes, Mr Oglethorpe, and come round and see me here—Piccadilly Circus—as soon as possible?—I should be immensely obliged to you. Yes, it is urgent—very urgent, in fact. Thank you—that's excellent"

The Chief put down the telephone, looked across to me

"Coming at once. Oglethorpe knows me well enough to know that when I say 'urgent' it means urgent. Now I hope we shall learn something"

Perhaps ten quiet minutes elapsed—ten minutes in which Q Q, after leaning back thoughtfully in his chair for a moment or two, bent forward to his desk and wrote rapidly a long single column of words on a sheet of paper—and then Mr Oglethorpe was announced

He came into the room, a thin, worried-looking man of about forty-five years of age, clean-shaven, a little bald, conventionally the higher grade Civil Servant in his morning-coat, dark trousers, and the silk hat courteously doffed as he entered, conventionally the Civil Servant, too, in his precise, somewhat pedantic manner. The Chief shook hands with him like an old acquaintance, indicated the chair close to his desk. Mr Oglethorpe seated himself

"You want to see me about this terrible business in the office, I suppose, Mr Quayne?" he said

"Exactly" Q Q smiled at him

"I have worked with Arbuthnot for twenty years—and I should never have dreamed that he was the man to commit suicide!" exclaimed Mr Oglethorpe, in a tone of genuine horror at the memory

Q Q continued to smile as he looked straight at his visitor, but there was no humour in that smile

"Perhaps he did not commit suicide, Mr Oglethorpe" he said quietly

Mr Oglethorpe jumped in his chair

"What? Did not commit suicide? What on earth do you mean, Mr Quayne? It must have been suicide—why, I was in the room a fraction of a minute after his revolver went off—I heard it as I passed along the corridor. It couldn't—how could it?—have been anything else than suicide, incredible though it seems!" Mr Oglethorpe was a picture of puzzled bewilderment—the implication in Q Q's words was plain enough.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe," the Chief spoke in his smoothest tones, "there is a little doubt about it—for reasons which I will not go into. Will you just tell me all you know of the tragedy?"

Mr Oglethorpe told his story quite clearly and definitely just as we had heard it already from Sebright. He was coming along the corridor from another department at ten past twelve when he heard the shot. He had rushed into the room. Arbuthnot was there alone, crumpled in his chair, a wound in the right side of his head. Horrified, he had dashed off to give the alarm. Yes—of course he knew the cupboard in Arbuthnot's room—he could not say whether the door of it was open or shut—he hadn't given a thought to it. He had seen no one in the corridor, before or after the tragedy.

Q Q nodded gravely as he finished.

"Well, Mr Oglethorpe, there is a possibility—I don't want to enlarge upon it—that Arbuthnot was murdered by one of the clerks in his own department."

"Impossible!" Mr. Oglethorpe was emphatic, all his instincts outraged. "It is a monstrously absurd suggestion, Mr Quayne, one that—as the temporary acting head of the department and in view of the plain facts—I cannot but resent!"

"Nevertheless, Mr Oglethorpe, it is a suggestion that has been made—and one that I am bound to probe. You would of course do all you could to assist in finding poor Arbuthnot's murderer—assuming that he *was* murdered?"

"Of course I should—though, I repeat, I can't for a moment believe it. What do you require of me?"

"I want to submit the six confidential clerks in your department to a little psychological test. It is one which—if I can trust the experience of the Viennese police, and sundry little efforts of my own—can scarcely fail in such circumstances. You have heard of the word-association method?"

"Something to do with psycho-analysis, isn't it?—sheer quackery, all of it, in my opinion." Mr. Oglethorpe let it be seen that he was old-fashioned and proud of it.

"Precisely," Q Q concurred, with a smile. "It is a method much used by psycho-analysts. I put a word to you. You answer as quickly as possible with the first word that rises in your mind in association. I measure the time-interval, in each case, between my

question and your answer. In my list of words are one or two which have a direct bearing upon the case. When those words are put to the concealed criminal, he instantly recognises their danger and instinctively—no matter what his command of himself—hesitates for a safe word to give in answer. It is quite automatic on his part. And accordingly, to those key-words his time-interval of association will show us appreciably longer than his average. Now, I want you to have the goodness to send your clerks across to me, one by one, this afternoon, Mr Oglethorpe—and since I want to get as wide a basis as possible for my averages, I should be very glad if you would commence with yourself now.”

“I haven’t the slightest faith in any of this psycho-analytic charlatanry,” said Mr Oglethorpe, with a superior note of condescending disdain in his voice, “but if you think it will help you, go ahead by all means. Fire away—I’m ready.”

Q Q drew his sheet of paper in front of him, sat with pencil-point poised.

“*Bread!*” he said, and his pencil-point commenced to dot across the paper.

“*Butter!*” answered Mr Oglethorpe promptly. Q Q stopped dotting at his first syllable, scribbled the word rapidly.

“*Sea!*” dot-dot—

“*Ship!*”

“*Horse!*” dot-dot—

“*Cart!*”

“*House!*” dot-dot-dot—

“*Room!*”

“*Desk!*” dot-dot-dot-dot—

“*Chair!*”

“*Table!*” dot-dot-dot—

“*Cloth!*”

“*Cupboard!*” dot-dot-dot—

“*Bone!*” Mr Oglethorpe gave the answer, an obvious nursery-rhyme memory, almost desperately. The strain of keeping his brain alert he evidently found more difficult than he had anticipated. Q Q scribbled down each answer as it was given.

“*Carpet!*” dot-dot—

“*Floor!*”

—and so on through a list of about fifty words where, at intervals, I remarked only “*code*”, “*revolver*” and “*murder*” as specially significant.

When he had got to the end, Q Q looked up with his quiet smile.

“Thank you, Mr Oglethorpe,” he said—it was impossible to deduce whether or not he had detected any grounds for suspicion in that rapid quasi-schoolchild examination—“I am much obliged

by your complaisance And now will you carry it to the length of sending along your clerks, one by one, in order, let us say, of their seniority?"

Mr. Oglethorpe rose from his chair

"Very well, Mr Quayne However unfounded I may and do consider your suspicions to be, it is my duty to help you probe them But I'm quite sure you'll find in the end that poor Arbuthnot committed suicide"

"Perhaps, Mr Oglethorpe" Q Q smiled at him "But I should all the same like to try my little test on your other clerks"

Mr Oglethorpe departed Q Q did not address a word to me in the interval while we waited for the appearance of the next clerk from Arbuthnot's office I busied myself on the routine task before me Q Q leaned back in his chair, finger-tips together, frowning in a concentration of thought beyond my guesses

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan was announced He was a younger man than Mr Oglethorpe, struck a more modern note of smartly-tailored, keen-edged efficiency The little dark moustache on his good-looking face was neatly trimmed, his monocle gave him a touch of aristocratic differentiation from the usual office-worn type, his manner had the self-confident ease produced by the best of public-schools and the Varsity He smiled affably—with, however, a Foreign-Office consciousness of personal dignity—as he approached the Chief

"Oglethorpe tells me you want to see me about poor Arbuthnot's death, Mr. Quayne" He sank easily and comfortably into the chair Q Q indicated to him "Anything I can do, of course"—he made a gesture of perfect readiness to oblige—"but I'm afraid that's not much"

Q Q's quiet eyes were summing him up

"So I understand You were at lunch I believe when the tragedy occurred?"

"Yes I knew nothing about it until I returned and the Scotland Yard fellow told me It was a shock to me, of course, as it was to every one else Poor old fellow! One would never have suspected a suicidal streak in him—some private worry, perhaps"

Q Q caressed his chin

"Did Mr Oglethorpe tell you precisely why I wanted to see you, Mr Vaughan?"

"No He merely said that you wished to talk to me on the matter"

Q Q nodded

"Then I will tell you, Mr Vaughan—and perhaps it would be as well if you regarded it as in confidence There is reason to suspect that Mr Arbuthnot did not commit suicide—but that he

was shot by one of the clerks in his personal department—a clerk who had an urgent motive to suppress him promptly ”

His eyes were fixed on Mr D’Arcy Vaughan as he spoke, but Mr Vaughan manifested only the startled vivification of interest normal in such circumstances

“You mean—*murdered*?” he gasped

“I mean murdered ” The Chief was impressively specific

“But—my dear sir!”—Mr D’Arcy Vaughan was obviously much perturbed—“it seems to me fantastic—Oglethorpe almost saw him shoot himself—he was in the room a moment later—before any murderer could have escaped!” He paused for a look of utter incredulity at Q Q “What grounds have you for such a wildly improbable theory? Who could possibly have shot Arbuthnot—unless Oglethorpe did it himself—which is grotesquely absurd!”

“That is what we are going to try and find out, Mr Vaughan,” replied the Chief quietly “I’m sure I can call upon you to give me any assistance in your power?”

“Certainly—certainly,” said Mr Vaughan, “of course!—But what do you want me to do?”

“I’ll explain ” And Q Q explained to him, precisely as he had explained to Mr Oglethorpe, the psychological test he proposed to apply to the six clerks Mr Vaughan accepted it unhesitatingly “Of course, there must be no exceptions,” he said “Obviously ”

Once more, Q Q pronounced his list of words, dotted down the time-interval before the associated word came in answer Mr Vaughan replied to all with—so far as I could tell—an equally prompt rapidity He was plainly a quick-brained, highly intelligent fellow

“Thank you, Mr Vaughan,” said Q Q, when he had finished—again it was impossible for me to guess, through his quiet normality of tone and feature, whether or not he had discovered the clue he sought for “And now perhaps you will be good enough to send across the others in order of their seniority It is unnecessary,” he added, with a smile, “to tell them of the purpose for which I require them ”

Three more clerks followed in due course and succession—Mr Wainwright, Mr Turner and Mr Billmore All three of them were most improbable murderers, for all three—Q Q checked their answers one against the other—had been in their office all the morning, had not left it on any pretext until Mr Oglethorpe had rushed in with the news of Arbuthnot’s suicide Nevertheless, all three of them submitted to the test—and Q Q remained quietly smiling and inscrutable as they were successively dismissed

The next—and last—to present himself was the junior, Mr Johnson, a tall, nervous but pleasant-looking lad, scarcely in his twenties

"Sit down, Mr Johnson," said Q Q, smiling at him and indicating the chair in which Johnson's predecessors had sat "You were in the Registry at the time the tragedy occurred this morning?"

"Yes, sir" The boy submitted easily to the quiet authority which emanated from Q Q's personality "I was searching for a file that had been mislaid"

"Between what times—precisely?"

"It was a little before ten to twelve when I left my room, sir I returned at twenty minutes past" The lad was obviously nervous He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue before he spoke

"So from ten to twelve to nearly twenty past you were in the Registry?"

"Yes, sir"

Q Q looked at him penetratingly from under his heavy grey eyebrows

"Very well It is necessary for me to check all the statements I receive I will just ring up the Registry and get them to confirm those times" He reached for the telephone

"Don't do that, sir!" The lad had half sprung from his chair

"Why?"

"I did not tell you the truth, sir" I saw perspiration on the boy's brow, once more his tongue moistened his lips He turned away his eyes from Q Q's piercing scrutiny

"Then please tell me the truth now!"

"Yes, sir. I—I did not go straight to the Registry I slipped out of the building"

"Out of the building?—Why?"

"To send a telegram—at the Post Office across the road in Parliament Street"

"To whom did you send the telegram?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir"

Q Q frowned I felt suddenly sorry for that lad, horrifyingly suspicious though were the circumstances that so suddenly gathered about him

"Johnson!" The Chief's voice was sharply stern—a voice it was impossible not to obey "You will tell me at once to whom you sent that telegram?"

The lad hesitated miserably I saw his hands clench and unclench themselves, his face go white

"It was to a moneylender, sir," he burst out after a moment when his voice seemed to have refused to function

"A moneylender?"

"Yes—yes, sir I—I wanted to keep it a secret He was threatening to denounce me to my Chiefs if I did not pay to-day—you know what that would have meant, sir?" The boy spoke hurriedly now, imploringly "I had written to my sister, telling

her all about it At a quarter to twelve, I received a telegram from her—saying she would help me Here it is, sir ” The lad fished out a crumpled telegram from his pocket, held it out to Q Q , who took it without removing his eyes from the soul under their scrutiny “ I dashed across to the Post Office to send a telegram to him telling him that my sister was paying—to take no action ” The lad stopped breathlessly, his eyes miserably on Q Q ’s inscrutable face

The Chief glanced at the telegram in his hand

“ This is not very explicit,” he said “ It merely says ‘ All right, Vera ’ That might mean anything—Do you grasp the point of this questioning, Johnson?”

“ No—no, sir ” The lad stuttered “ I—I don’t think I do ”

“ The point is that Mr Arbuthnot was murdered in his room at ten minutes past twelve On your story, you left the building at ten minutes before the hour Where were you at ten minutes past?”

“ In the Post Office, sir ”

“ From ten minutes to the hour to ten minutes past?—Twenty minutes?”

“ I had to wait in a queue, sir ”

“ And then you returned to the Registry?”

“ Yes, sir I took the file I said I wanted and went back to my room It was then I first heard the news about poor Mr Arbuthnot, sir ”

“ H’m—Well, the Post Office records will prove the truth of your statements Your telegram will note the time it was handed in You say that was ten past?”

“ No, sir The telegram was handed in at quarter past At ten past I was still waiting in the queue ”

“ Quarter past?—How long, Johnson, did it actually take you to run down from the corridor where your room is situated to the Post Office?”

“ Under two minutes, sir ”

“ And you are sure—*quite sure*—that it was at ten minutes to the hour—and not just after *ten minutes past* that you ran to the Post Office?” The implication in that question was terribly obvious.

“ Yes, sir ”

“ Well, I am going to test the truth of your story Now, listen to me——!” And once more Q Q explained the method he was going to employ “ To answer is the only way of clearing yourself from the suspicion that now rests upon you,” he said severely

“ Yes, sir But—believe me, sir—I know nothing about poor Mr Arbuthnot’s death—nothing—I swear to you, sir!” The lad was evidently horribly alarmed “ I was in the Post Office at the time, sir ”

Q Q ’s eyes probed him

"Calm yourself, Mr Johnson—And concentrate your mind on putting, as rapidly as possible, an associated word to the word I shall give you"

The boy gulped

"*Bread!*" dot-dot-dot—

"*Butter!*" He forced himself to the strain of an answer, hit the natural association which all his predecessors had given

"*Sea!*" dot-dot—

"*Shore!*"

"*Horse!*" dot-dot-dot-dot—

"*Hoof!*"

Q Q took him right through the list, dotting the intervals of his hesitations, scribbling down his replies. The lad answered irregularly, spasmodically, a perspiration of distress upon his forehead, a look of terror in the eyes that stared as though hypnotised at Q Q. It was all he could do, evidently, to keep his mind to the focus of what was required of him, and some of his associations were wildly wide—desperately clutched at in his anxiety to give a reply not too long delayed.

The Chief finished his inquisition, examined the paper with the irregular rows of dots, the final answers, compared them with the records of the others.

"H'm!" he grunted, his face inscrutable.

The lad sat staring at him, his hands twitching, scarcely daring—it would seem—to breathe.

The telephone-bell rang sharply. Q Q took up the instrument.

"Hallo?—Yes—Quayne speaking. Who's that?—Oh, Sebright?—What?—You've got your man?—Who is it?—Oglethorpe?"

Q Q smiled, grimly. "Beware of those clear cases, Sebright—They're often only the mirror of your own ideas. I'm afraid you'll have to release Oglethorpe—with apologies. Yes. *Why?* Because I happen to have caught the man, and it isn't Oglethorpe. I'll hand him over to you presently. By the way, Sebright, where are you ringing up from?—The F O?—Good!—Would you mind asking Mr D'Arcy Vaughan to step round here again as soon as possible?—I've something important to speak to him about—Thanks"

Q Q put back the receiver.

Young Johnson had sprung to his feet, stood quivering while Q Q talked. I watched him narrowly, my muscles tense to leap on him should he offer a sudden violence. There was a wild look in his frightened eyes.

"I—I didn't do it, sir!" he stammered.

The Chief smiled at him.

"I know you didn't," he said.

The boy stared, bewildered.

"Then—then—why have you asked Mr Vaughan to come here,

“sir?—You’re not going to—to tell him about that moneylender?” There was a new and scarcely less acute alarm in his face “For God’s sake, don’t sir! Mr Vaughan would report me at once!”

The Chief smiled again, more kindly

“Nor that, either—This experience in dealing with moneylenders will suffice you for a lifetime, I trust—That’s all I have to say to you, Mr Johnson” He nodded in dismissal

Young Johnson still could not quite grasp the situation

“You mean—you don’t want me any more, sir?”

“No—And if you should meet Mr Vaughan on your way back to your office, say nothing to him Good-afternoon”

Q Q turned back to those enigmatic papers which held a secret that tantalised my curiosity to a sudden fever-pitch

“Goo-good afternoon, sir!” The lad went out of that room, haunted for him with a dreadful ordeal, with a gladly-eager haste that was almost a flight

When he had gone, I looked across to the Chief

“You’ve got your man, sir?”

Q Q glanced up at me, his face grimly satisfied in its expression.

“Yes”

“It looked bad for young Johnson, sir—and he seemed to stumble terribly when you applied your test” I was, of course, fishing, but it had in fact seemed to me more than once that the lad must be betraying himself, so desperate were his hesitations

“Pooh! His time-intervals were of course wildly erratic—what one would expect from the strain he was undergoing—but on the key-words he was no more erratic than elsewhere Now this record,” he held up another sheet of paper, “is curiously regular—the shortest intervals of any—till we come to those same vital words And then there is a sudden seventy-five to a hundred per cent increase—almost imperceptible while he spoke, but evident enough here Moreover—automatically in his first quickness he gave the curious association ‘hide’ to the word ‘cupboard’—the only one to do so—after that, recognising his slip, he was on his guard—a little too much on his guard” He chuckled with satisfaction. “That’s the man, Mr Creighton!”

“Which man, sir?”

“Mr D’Arcy Vaughan”

“D’Arcy Vaughan!” I echoed the name in astonishment Mr. Vaughan had seemed to me the most normal of any of those six men who had sat in that chair—his answers unvarying in their glib rapidity “And—you’re going to arrest him, sir?—directly he comes in?” I thrilled with the sense of imminent crisis

“Not quite as soon as that, Mr Creighton What I have here is evidence enough for myself But it is not legal evidence I’m

going to get that legal evidence I'm going to get a signed confession" His tone was curt with a confidence I did not share

"D'Arcy Vaughan—if he's the man, sir—doesn't seem to me the sort of fellow to give confessions easily," I ventured "He must have immense nerve to behave as he did in this office"

"He has—a phenomenal nerve But even the strongest nerves can be broken down, Mr Cleighton" Q Q leaned back in his chair and smiled at me with a grim blandness "You've heard of the third degree, I suppose? It usually implies some physical pain to the prisoner under examination We're a little too civilised for that I'm going to put Mr D'Arcy Vaughan through what we may call the fourth degree—considerably more subtle and quite as efficacious"

"I don't understand, sir Do I come in this?"

"You, Mr Creighton, will merely quietly get up and lock that door behind Mr Vaughan when he enters, and then you will return to your desk, and get on with your work in absolute silence You will not utter a word, unless I speak to you"

"Very good, sir" I was utterly baffled to guess what scheme Q Q had in his mind, but it was with an intense impatience that I watched the minute-hand slip round the clock It was close on five Perhaps Mr D'Arcy Vaughan would after all smell a rat—not come? A feverish anxiety for his appearance mounted in me, obscured the petty routine task on which I was engaged

The office telephone-bell rang, startling me in the tension of my nerves The Chief answered it

"Mr D'Arcy Vaughan?—Show him in, please" From his tone, he might have been admitting the most casual of visitors, but he smiled—a smile of intimate satisfaction—at me as he put back the receiver

The door opened Mr D'Arcy Vaughan, sprucely elegant, his monocle in place, his good-looking features happily serene, entered the room I rose, went unobtrusively behind him, locked the door, returned to my place Mr Vaughan advanced towards Q Q

"Well, Mr Quayne," he said, in a voice that struck me as oddly cheerful for a man whose office had been the scene of such tragic events, "you've heard what has happened in this terrible business?—They've arrested Oglethorpe—poor, queer old Oglethorpe I would never have believed it possible, but Scotland Yard seems quite certain—and it knows its business, I suppose Awful!—terrible!—terrible!"

"Yes, I had heard," replied Q Q coolly

Mr Vaughan sat down in the chair, carefully deposited his glossy silk hat on a corner of Q Q's desk, and casually crossed one nicely-creased trouser-leg over the other If he were indeed the man, I could not but admire his perfect *aplomb*

"And now, Mr Quayne," he said, "before we come to whatever you want to see me about, there's a little thing I'm curious to know. Did the results of your psycho-analytic test by any chance coincide with those of the police?"

Q Q leaned back in his chair, tapped his finger-tips together

"No," he replied, "they did not"

Mr Vaughan smiled

"Ah?" His tone politely indicated a previous scepticism that was now justified "I trust you psycho-analysts will have the grace to acknowledge at least one failure of your magic methods!"

Q Q continued to tap his finger-tips together as he smiled blandly

"It was not a failure," he said

"Not a failure?—But—I do not understand—I thought you said——" Mr Vaughan was all courtesy, a rather malicious courtesy perhaps, in a gestured sketch of baffled comprehension. He smiled frankly, pleasantly, at his interlocutor

"It was not a failure" Q Q had spoken these words in the quietest, most dulcet of his tones. He rose from his chair, stood erect, spoke in a voice that to me seemed like a thunder-clap in its sudden stern vehemence "*Own up, Mr D'Arcy Vaughan!*—You're caught out!"

The man had sprung up from his chair also in an indignation that, whether real or stimulated, was impressive in its apparent authenticity

"What do you mean?" His voice quivered, but it was with anger "What are you trying to suggest?"

"I am suggesting, Mr D'Arcy Vaughan," Q Q's tone was sharply explicit, "that you are a spy in your own department, that you were betraying official secrets, that Mr Arbuthnot detected you, called you into his room this morning as you passed on your way to lunch and taxed you with it, that he had the imprudence perhaps to threaten you—possibly in self-defence—with his revolver during the altercation, that you seized that revolver and shot him dead, that hearing some one come to the door you then sprang into the clothes-cupboard and dodged out again directly the coast was clear. Is that definite enough for you?"

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan looked as though he were going to strike his accuser in the face. I saw his fists clench, the lips go blanched under his little dark moustache. His eyes flashed—the monocle dropped to dangle on its thread. He mastered himself with an effort

"Mr Quayne, if you were a younger man, I would thrash you for this outrageous imputation!" He gasped in his wrath "As it is, you have chosen to utter this monstrous slander before a

witness" He jerked his hand in my direction "You shall hear from my solicitors!" He strode towards the door

Fascinated, I watched him as he reached it, tugged at the handle, twisted it in vain Then he swung round again, his face ablaze with fury

"Open that door at once!" he cried "What does this mean?"

"It means, Mr D'Arcy Vaughan," said Q Q, in his most coldly level tones, "that you are a prisoner in this room until such time as you dictate and sign your confession"

The man glared at him, livid He could scarcely speak in the rage which choked him

"This is an outrage—a monstrous outrage!—You dare, Mr. Quayne—you *dare* to subject a Civil Servant of my standing to this gross indignity! To illegal detention!—Have a care, Mr Quayne!—You are laying yourself open to an action which I will fight through court after court till I ruin you!"

Q Q smiled grimly

"You may have another case to fight in the courts before that, Mr. Vaughan—It is useless to wrestle with that door You cannot open it"

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan had once more switched round to the door, was tugging at it, twisting at the handle in an almost maniacal fury of anger He faced round again to Q Q

"Open it, I say!—Open it——" he choked, "or——!"

"Or nothing, Mr Vaughan" Q Q was smoothly unruffled. "You will do nothing You will merely in due course, when you are tired of raging at that door, sit down in that chair and dictate your confession" With which, Q Q himself calmly resumed his seat, picked up a paper on his desk and apparently gave it his undivided, cool attention

Mr Vaughan stared at him for a moment, the muscles of his face twitching, his eyes murderous if ever a man's were—and then he strode straight across to me

"*You!*" The violence in his voice startled me, half prepared for it though I was "Open that door at once—or I charge you as an accomplice in this felony! Felony!—you understand?—Penal servitude!" Ugly menace looked out of him I gripped myself, remembered Q Q's orders, remained stolidly silent, bent over my work again "*Do you hear?*" My shoulder was violently shaken "Open that door, or——!" He had no threat vicious enough for his anger

I glanced at him, as coolly as I could—obviously my cue was to imitate the Chief, at that moment quite unperturbed, apparently engrossed in the perusal of some document—saw the ferocity in his glare, saw his fingers working—itching for a weapon which, thank Heaven, he did not possess—and remained dumb Not only dumb,

but, as well as I could feign it—deaf Mr D'Arcy Vaughan, I could see in the instant before my eyes went down to my work again could have screamed blasphemies in the extremity of his exasperation. The uncanny completeness of our silence sent a gleam of fright into his eyes. Then once more they went impotently murderous. I guessed, even as with an effort of self-command I turned my gaze away from him, that he was speculating whether he would have a chance in a hand-to-hand mix-up with the pair of us.

Apparently, he decided that he would not. I felt him remove his presence from over me, glanced up discreetly to see him once more in the centre of the room, facing the Chief.

"Mr Quayne!" He controlled his voice to a harsh similitude of normality. "Do you mean that you have the insane intention of keeping me a prisoner in this room until I sign a confession of a murder of which I know nothing?"

Q Q raised his eyes to him, as though only just again aware of his presence.

"You are begging the question, Mr Vaughan," he said quietly, turning over a page of his papers while he spoke. "I have all the relevant information. I require only your confession. And it is certainly my intention to keep you here till I get it."

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan achieved a short, scornful laugh.

"Very well," he said. "We shall see who can wait longest." He flung himself into a chair, sat tapping with his foot upon the floor. "You yourselves cannot sit for ever in this room—And when we leave it, Mr Quayne, believe me, you shall rue this outrage!"

Mr Quayne merely turned over another page of the document he was perusing with such concentrated attention.

His victim glared at him, opened his cigarette-case—I noticed, maliciously, that it contained only one cigarette—struck a match, commenced to smoke. The silence of that room, high above the neighbouring house-tops, was like the grave. It perpetuated itself, continued until even I felt a strain upon my nerves. The only sound was the deep breathing of that man in the chair adjacent to Q Q's desk. Unobtrusively, I kept a sharp eye upon him alert to interpose in that sudden panther-spring I felt to be imminent. But none came. Mr D'Arcy Vaughan sat immobile, his lips pressed tight, smoking with the tiniest of puffs, evidently—I could sympathise with him—trying to economise that one and only cigarette to the last possible moment. And the silence in that room continued, persisted till it seemed to ring in my ears.

I glanced at the clock-hand. It marked half-past five.

Mr Vaughan stirred.

"Mr Quayne!"

Q Q lifted an eyebrow at him.

"How long is this madness to continue?"

"Until I get your confession" Q Q's tone was quietly acceptive of the situation, was, without the faintest impatience, coolly confident of the final result

"Psha!" The man jumped up from his chair again, paced up and down the room in febrile exasperation Q Q had once more reverted to the perusal of his documents, did not so much as glance at him The victim strode once more across to me, evidently on the impulse to make another trial of my subordinate resolution I forced myself to remain unperceptive of his presence I could feel the glare of his eyes upon me as I bent my own down to my work, could feel him hesitate over the utility of the appeal—or of the threat He renounced either I heard his soft footfalls on the carpet recede away to the centre of the room, heard them go towards Q Q's desk, heard the sudden creak of his chair as he flung himself down into it again

When, discreetly, I glanced up, I saw him sitting there, his fingers drumming on his knee, the cigarette short between his lips glowing in a momentary forgetfulness of economy

The silence continued The ticking of the clock became insistent, an obsession to the ear Its hands slipped round—six o'clock—a quarter past Outside, the light began to die out of the sky Within the room, there were already shadows Long ago, Mr D'Arcy Vaughan had got to the end of his smoke For what seemed an age, he had sat like a statue, utterly motionless What was he thinking?—I wondered And still the silence remained unbroken

It was shattered suddenly

"Quayne!" The man paused, waiting for a movement of Q Q's head that did not occur "I don't know how long this farce is going on—but I'll count it as mitigation if you'll give me a cigarette"

But Mr Quayne had apparently lost the sense of hearing He merely picked another from the pile of documents at his hand Once more the room relapsed into silence—into a silence that grew haunted, terrifying, vibrant with mysterious unuttered menace as the twilight deepened in the room—a silence that *rang* and yet was soundless A sudden mutter from the man in the chair seemed only to intensify it How long, indeed, was this going on? I myself grew unnerved with the strain, felt the impulse to use my voice—to break this uncanny hush—rise up in me, almost irresistible Had I been sitting there with the guilt of murder on my conscience, I could not have refrained from shouting it aloud to get relief at any cost from this intolerable ordeal of soundlessness wherein the stark fundamental outlines of one's soul seemed automatically to emerge I should have screamed that guilt, in hysteria, long ago But still the man I could half see in the gloom sat motionless and

silent in his chair Still, Q Q remained, holding up a document to get the last of the light, seemingly oblivious of his presence For myself, I had given up even the pretence of work I sat gripped in that dead hush, and waited—waited—while the shadows thickened I could no longer see the hour upon the clock-face

Suddenly I heard a sound—the faintest little whirr—and then .

"He shall confess, Mr Quayne—I am determined on it!"

The voice came out of the gloom, solemn, deep-toned, vibrant with authority—the voice of the murdered Arbuthnot! Even to me, who could an instant later guess its source, it came with a shock to my nerves, uncanny from the formless shadows of the room To the man in the chair, it came with the full force of a supernatural presence—sternly inexorable in a ghostly omnipotence He sprang to his feet, stood quivering

"What was that?—Quayne!—Did you hear that?—*Arbuthnot's voice!*—I—I—no—it couldn't be!—it couldn't be!—Quayne!" His voice was strained with terror "Let me out of this! I'm going mad! I can't stand it any longer!"

Q Q apparently did not hear him He did not move One hand still held the document up to the last glimmer of outside-light, the other was out of sight beneath his desk Mr D'Arcy Vaughan gasped Once more he turned towards me, and I saw his two hands go slowly, quiveringly, up towards his head as he stood silhouetted against the window The man was gripped in a paroxysm of terror at those suddenly vocable shadows all around him—at *himself*

"No," I heard him whisper to himself, "no!—It couldn't have been!—*It couldn't have been!*"

And then once more came that solemn, deep-toned, authoritative voice

"He shall confess, Mr Quayne—I am determined on it!"

A gurgling choked scream broke from the tortured wretch

"No! No!—Quiet, Arbuthnot!—*Quiet, for God's sake!* I—I can't bear it!—I—I'll tell—I'll confess!—I'll confess!—Quayne!—*Quayne!*" His voice came almost in a shriek from the shadows which hid his face "I'll confess!—I'll confess! Take it down—I'll confess!"

Q Q laid down his papers

"Take down what Mr Vaughan dictates, Mr Creighton," he said, quietly "Resume your chair, Mr Vaughan" He touched the switch by his desk, and the room was suddenly flooded with light

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan, no longer the spruce, well-groomed Civil Servant, but a haggard, wild-eyed wretch—I was startled at the havoc the ordeal had made in him—obeyed like a creature drained of volition, dropped heavily into his chair I took up my pen and wrote as, quaveringly, gaspingly, the utterly unnerved, broken man began his confession It was a confession of official secrets betrayed,

sent by agony-column code-messages to a great foreign commercial organisation to which they were of immense utility, of—precisely as Q Q had divined—Arbuthnot's having stopped him as he went along the corridor to his lunch, taxed him with it, of a wild alarm, a determination to suppress this danger at once, of the beginnings of a murderous struggle in which Arbuthnot had snatched the revolver from his drawer, of another snatch at that revolver which had seized it, of the sudden shot, of Oglethorpe at the door, of a spring into the clothes-cupboard, and a moment later—when Oglethorpe had dashed out again, horrified at the discovery—of a quick rush along the corridor, unobserved, to lunch

Q Q listened, immobile, inscrutable, to the end

"Now sign, Mr Vaughan," he said in his quiet level voice

The man got up from his chair, moved towards my desk—stopped suddenly

"No!" he cried Obviously he made a great effort to pull himself together, to resume command of himself, seemed to succeed "No!—I won't sign!" He laughed like a maniac "It's only your word against mine—both of you—and I'll swear it's a fabrication—a tissue of lies! I'm not going to sign away my life because you played a trick on me! How you did it, I don't know—but trick I'm sure it was!"

He stood, glowering defiance at Q Q

"As you like, Mr Vaughan," said the Chief quietly "It makes really no difference whether you sign or not Just listen a moment!" He bent forward, touched something on his desk "Another little trick, Mr Vaughan" He smiled pleasantly

To my own astonishment there issued into the room, startlingly life-like, Mr D'Arcy Vaughan's voice in a recapitulated, word for word recital of his crime The first few sentences of it were sufficient—Mr D'Arcy Vaughan raised his hand To his first amazement had succeeded a sudden bitterness of comprehension

"That's enough," he said "I don't want to hear it over again" He controlled his voice to a cynical appreciation "A dictaphone, of course?"

"A double-barrelled one, Mr Vaughan," said the Chief, still pleasantly "With a blank record waiting for you"

He glared at Q Q in a sudden last flash of ferocity "Curse you and your infernal cunning tricks!" he said "All right—I may as well sign" He came across to my desk, scrawled a signature at the foot of the paper I presented to him, turned again with a snarl to the Chief "Now what are you going to do?"

Q Q smiled grimly, took off the telephone receiver, asked for a number

"Sebright?—Ah, Quayne speaking Just come round here, will

you? I've got that man for you Yes Signed confession He's only waiting for your handcuffs " He put back the receiver

Mr D'Arcy Vaughan swayed on his feet, one hand feeling blindly for support at the edge of my desk

"Mr Quayne," he said, his eyes closed "It would be Christian charity to give me a drink—brandv!"

He had finished my flask by the time Sebright arrived

Trevis Tarrant

THE EPISODE OF "TORMENT IV"

By

C DALY KING

WE were driving straight towards horror Though we didn't know it yet

Valerie said, "Darling, I do hope Trevis' friend has a decent place I want a big room, with blinds to make it dim, and none of those awful New Hampshire spiders And I want a nice, long bath "

"Oh, I guess his place is all right Nothing much any one can do about New Hampshire spiders, though, they're big and nasty But there won't be any in our room The fellow probably has a good enough shack Why shouldn't he?"

"Ugh! Spiders " Valerie grimaced " Yes, I suppose it'll be a good house Trevis is rather tasteful about places himself "

We were motoring down from Canada and had arranged to pick up Tarrant at Winnespequam Lake where he had been staying with a friend named Morgan White, whom neither Valerie nor I had met Tarrant planned to come along with us to New York a couple of days later, for White had been good enough to write, asking us to break our trip at his place for a day or so We had gotten well along now, had passed Lancaster and were scooting through the Crawford Notch as fast as we could It was as hot as blazes

I said, " Another hour and a half will get us there Then a swim, before anything else I feel like a strip of wilted cardboard "

" I want a nice, long bath," Valerie repeated

Ahead of us a small truck and a touring car loaded with about eighteen sweating travellers in their shirt sleeves were creeping along the hot asphalt through the centre of the valley I gave the horn some lusty digs and we swerved past them

And that, though we didn't know it, either, was our introduction to the episode of " Torment IV "

" The most intriguing problem I have ever heard of," said Tarrant, " is the mystery of the *Mary Celeste* It is practically perfect "

As he spoke, he leaned back in the hammock chair and the moonlight glinted through dusk against the sharp lines of his lean, strong face Across the water came the twinkle of little, twin lights, red

and green, where a motor-boat, a mere shadow on the darkening lake, put out from the opposite shore

Valerie and I had arrived, hot and tired, about five in the afternoon. And I had had a most refreshing swim. Winnespequam, as a good many people know, is a New Hampshire lake. It is typical. Surrounded by hills, it has gathered around itself an almost unbroken line of the estates of prosperous merchants and professional men whose winter homes are in New York and Philadelphia. Some of the natives, too, boast modest bungalows nestling near the water, to which they repair during the summer months from their more permanent quarters in the little town that runs down to the northern tip of the lake. Even the motor highway that circles the shore travels chiefly between forested slopes and does little to disfigure the scene. It is a pleasant and carefree resort.

White, a big man and a good host, grunted, "Don't know it. I'm sure you do. What's the *Mary Celeste*?"

"You don't know the *Mary Celeste*?" Tarrant was plainly surprised. "Why, it's the perfect problem of all time. Dozens of people have had a whack at it, including some fairly clever ones, but it remains to-day as unsolved and apparently insoluble as it was sixty years ago."

He paused, then, as we were all quiet, obviously waiting for further information, he went on again. "The *Mary Celeste*, sometimes wrongly called the *Marie Celeste*, was a 200-ton brig owned by an American called Winchester. She was picked up by the barque, *Des Gracia*, one pleasant afternoon early in December, 1872, about three hundred miles west of Gibraltar. This was what was wrong about her: there was not a soul on board and she was sailing derelict on the starboard tack against a north wind that was driving her off her course. Her chronometer, her manifest, bills of lading and register were missing. A further examination showed that a cutlass hanging in her cabin bore stains as if blood had been wiped from it, but a medical officer in Gibraltar, who subsequently analysed these stains, declared that they were not of blood. There was a deep cut in her rail, as if made by an axe, but no axe has been mentioned as having been found aboard. On both sides of the bows a small strip, a little more than an inch wide and six or seven feet long, had recently been cut from her outer planking a few feet above the water line, this strip was only about three-eighths of an inch deep and had no effect upon her seaworthiness. Her log had been written up to the evening of the twelfth day previous and the slate log carried to eight a.m. of the eleventh day before. In other words the log was not up-to-date.

"But what was right about her was more astonishing. In the galley were the remains of a burnt-out fire above which stood the victuals for the crew's breakfast. Some of their clothes were hang-

ing upon a line to dry and their effects were in good order and undisturbed. In the master's cabin breakfast had been partly eaten; some porridge was left in a bowl and an egg had been cut open and left standing in its holder. A bottle of cough mixture had been left on the table, its cork beside it. An harmonium stood in one corner and in a sewing machine was a child's garment, partly sewed. None of these articles were in any way disturbed. In the first mate's quarters, moreover, was found a piece of paper with an unfinished sum upon it, just as he had put it aside when interrupted. For the eleven days during which the log had not been kept, the weather over the course from the point last noted in the log to the position where the *Mary Celeste* was found, had been mild. The cargo, some casks of alcohol for Genoa, was intact and securely stowed. The boat itself was staunch in all respects, hull, masts and rigging. There was no sign whatsoever of fire or other hazard. And last of all, the single small boat with which the brig was equipped, was upon its davits, untouched and properly secured.

"Those are the essential facts, as evidenced by many and reliable witnesses. They make a very pretty problem. Of course, a good many hypotheses have been advanced. But actually not one of them is even as easy to credit as the curious state of affairs that was discovered when the *Mary Celeste* was boarded that December afternoon. What could possibly have happened to make a competent crew, not to mention the captain's wife and small daughter, abandon a perfectly sound ship in fine weather, without so much as attempting to launch her boat?"

There was a little silence.

"Match your mystery," White grunted. "Right here."

Tarrant twisted round in his chair. "Yes? I think you would be put to it to find another enigma with such simple and such contradictory factors."

"Judge for yourself," said our host. "The Blacks. That big place just across the lake is theirs. Closed up now. They had the *Torment IV* and they were——"

Struck by his unusual expression, I interrupted. "What in heaven's name is a torment four?" I asked. "How do you mean they had it?"

"Oh, no mystery there," he assured us. "That is the name of their motor-boat. Blacks have been coming up here for years, and a good many years ago now they got their first boat. Just when steam launches were going out and gas engines coming in. Wasn't much of a boat, jerky and spasmodic, and among other essentials it lacked a self-starter. A fairly thorough nuisance, and they named it, quite properly, *Torment*."

"Presently they got another, though the second one had a self-starter it was just one more thing to be spasmodic and *Torment II* was a good name for that one also. The third was much better, really a proper boat, but by that time the name had become traditional. *Torment III* was turned in only a year ago and the new one, *Torment IV*, is a beauty, long, fast, polished up like a new dime. I was out in her early this summer, I remember at the time that *Torment* seemed a foolish title for such a beautiful piece of machinery, but now—well, I don't know."

He paused, and, "Yes, but what happened?" asked Valerie.

"All killed. Lester Black and his wife, Amelie, and their small daughter. Just like your captain and his family."

"I didn't say the captain had been killed." Tarrant's reservation came softly across from the railing.

"Touch," said White. "Wrong myself. They're dead, at least two of 'em are. Said they were killed, but I don't even know that. No one knows what actually happened to them."

The voice from the railing was plainly interested now. "Come on, Morgan, what did happen?"

"I tell you I don't know. It was really extraordinary. Well, here's the story. Blacks came up early this year and so did I. It occurred about the end of June, hot spell then, if you remember, and we got it here, too. It was a beautiful, bright day and very warm for that time of year. Middle of the afternoon, *Torment IV* ran ashore a little way up the lake from here, that was the first we knew anything was wrong."

"Let me take your method and tell you what was right about her first. To begin with, her keel was hardly scratched and that came from her grounding, which happened by good luck on a strip of sand. Later, when the affair turned into a tragedy, I went over her carefully with the sheriff and there wasn't another mark or dent of any kind on her. Engine, transmission, and so on, in perfect condition—ran her back to the Blacks' dock myself after we found her. Have to tell you the cushions and pillows on the after-deck are life preservers in themselves, filled with some kind of stuff that will keep you afloat if necessary. Not one of 'em had been disturbed in any way, all present and accounted for. Not a leak, not a single miss from the motor—nothing."

"In fact, only two items were wrong. First, one of the chairs on the after-deck was overturned, might have happened when she ran ashore. Second, no one was in her. I know, for I saw the boat a hundred yards or so off land and watched her bump. That's all."

Tarrant threw the remains of his cigar in a wide arc and, three seconds later, came a tiny *phizz* as it struck the water below.

"You mean these three people simply vanished?" he demanded "How do you know they even went out in the boat, in the first place?"

"Found that out when I took the boat back They had gone out after lunch, apparently for a joy ride And they were drowned somewhere in the middle of the lake—two of the bodies were recovered later, Black's and his wife's, not the child's—but how or why is a complete mystery "

"But in the middle of a bright afternoon——" Tarrant began "There were no witnesses at all? No one saw them?"

"Well, they went up to the town dock at the end of the lake and got some gas, that was established Then they headed out again—Lester Black was running the boat—and that is the last any one saw of them Of course, end of June, not many people around the lake, still a bit early for the summer people Just the same it is strange Inquiries were made all around the lake, of course, but no one was found to throw even a glimmer on the thing "

"H'm," remarked Tarrant "There was no obvious cause, I suppose? No trouble, financial or otherwise? An estrangement between husband and wife, something serious?"

"Not a chance," White grunted "I wasn't an intimate friend but I've known them for years Man had plenty of money, lived a leisurely life, great family man, as a matter of fact Very fond of his wife and daughter and they of him Last thing in the world he would do, kill them and drown himself, if you've anything like that in your head "

Tarrant, meantime, had lit a cigarette and now smoked silently for some minutes Finally he spoke "Still, something like that is all you leave, if your other facts are right, isn't it? People don't jump out of a perfectly good motor-boat in the middle of a lake for nothing Could they swim?"

"They could all swim, though probably none of them would have been good for a mile or more And I've told you about the life preservers, every one of them in the boat We made a careful check of that, naturally "

"Well, there you are The more you say, the more it appears to have been a purposeful performance There are lots of things in people's lives that are kept pretty well hidden What happened to the boat?"

"I don't believe there was a thing in Lester Black's life that would account for that kind of tragedy," our host insisted "Prosaic man, prosaic as hell The boat was inherited by the Constables, cousins of the Blacks Live next them up here, down the road a bit They didn't use the boat for some time, didn't care to, I guess Lately they've been taking her out once in a while Boat's really too good to throw away "

Again there came a pause, but just as I was about to enter an opinion, Tarrant summed the matter up "Let's see, here it is, then Black took his wife and daughter out for a spin on a nice, clear day First they went to the village dock and bought gas Then they turned out into the lake once more From the time when they left the village—— By the way, when was that?"

"Between two and two-thirty"

"And when did the boat come ashore?"

"Just about four o'clock"

"Then some time during that hour and a half the man and his wife went overboard and doubtless the child, too There is no way, apparently, of fixing it closer than that?"

"No, none Boat may have come ashore directly they were out of it or it may have cruised around for an hour or more No one noticed it"

"The boat was entirely unharmed and, in any event, they would not have abandoned it ordinarily in the middle of the lake without the precaution of providing themselves with the life preservers so readily at hand I'm sure there was no fire or you would have mentioned it"

"Absolutely not," White declared "Not a trace of anything like fire Anyhow, since it obviously didn't burn up, they would have had plenty of time to throw over *all* the preservers in that case"

I had a sudden thought "How about some sort of fumes from the engine that might have affected all of them at once so that they were forced to jump without waiting for anything?"

White merely grunted and Tarrant's tone was quizzical "Hardly, Jerry In an open boat proceeding at a fair speed no fumes would get much of a chance to affect the passengers And some mysterious poison fumes that would make them jump instantly are simply incredible If the engine burned ordinary gas, as it did, carbon monoxide is all that could possibly come off So that if we grant the impossible and assume that it came through the floor instead of going out the exhaust—and then stayed near the deck—the result would surely have been to asphyxiate the people, certainly not to throw them overboard No, that's out

"There remain, of course, several alternatives," he continued "The first is that White threw his wife and daughter out and followed them as a suicide That's the one you don't care for, Morgan"

"Can't see it at all Silly"

"There are a nubber of reasons to account for such an action A bitter quarrel is only one of them There is temporary aberration, followed by remorse, for example"

"Nonsense Still silly You didn't know Black"

"All right, we'll reverse it The wife hits the man over the head

while he is running the boat, throws him out and then follows *him* with the child. The aberration theory fits a woman better than a man, anyhow, they are more highly strung. How about that?"

"Trevis, come off it." White seemed almost provoked by the last notion. "Aside from Amelie's being incapable of such a thing psychologically, I'll tell you why it's absurd. She was a little woman, much smaller than Black. She couldn't possibly have tossed him out *unless* she hit him first. And he hadn't been hit. The autopsies showed that neither of them had a single mark of violence on them."

Undoubtedly Tarrant was smiling in the darkness as he said, "Very well, we'll leave that theory entirely. I was only thinking abstractly, you know, no reflections intended. Then we are left with one more hypothesis, the accident one."

"Ugh."

"Perhaps it's the most reasonable of all, anyhow. The child falls overboard, the mother jumps to save it, the father, who is running the boat, is the last to act. He jumps to save them both, and they are all drowned, while the boat, which in the excitement he has failed to close off, speeds away."

White answered at once. "Won't do, either. Naturally, we've been over that possibility up here. There is not merely one, but three or four points, against it. Altogether too many. As I said, they all knew how to swim and the daughter was about ten, not helpless in the water by any means, even with her clothes on. In the second place, the Blacks have been aquaplaning for years, and aquaplaning behind a fast boat is no joke. Matter of fact, not even aquaplaning, they did it on water skis, much harder. The point is, if any one had fallen over, they would naturally have followed what they have done so often when there was a spill off the skis, swung the boat about and come up to the swimmer. They were used to doing that, they could do it quickly, it was a habit. They were all used to the water, to being on it and in it, couldn't possibly have lost their heads completely over a mere tumble."

"But last and most impressive of all, I tell you that Black was a prosaic and methodical man, known for it. Supposing some real emergency—though what it could have been, God knows—supposing the wife did jump and he prepared to go after her. He would never have left his boat empty without shutting off the motor, it doesn't take an instant. Granting even that impossibility, however, it is simply beyond belief that he would have jumped to their rescue himself before throwing them at least a couple of preservers, which would reach them more quickly than he and be of as much use. You must remember that they weren't at all helpless in the water, either of them. He would surely have done that first. Then,

I grant you, he *might* have gone in, just to make sure But the theory you built won't do No, it won't Really "

"The objections are strong," Tarrant acknowledged "Of course, I didn't know the people at all Well, that's the end of the list, so far as I can see now You discard them all, the first as being impossible on grounds of character, the second on physical grounds, the third on grounds of habit and familiarity with the water and its hazards I——"

For the first time during the discussion Valerie interrupted She had been sitting quietly beyond Tarrant and smoking while the talk went on Now she said, "May I suggest something? Perhaps it's pretty wild What about this? The parents had received some kind of threat, kidnapping or something No, this is better They were hailed from the shore while they were riding about and they landed There the child actually *was* kidnapped The parents were stricken with grief, they were quite out of their heads for a time They went out on the lake again and presently made a suicide pact and both honoured it at once That covers it all, doesn't it? The child's body, I understood, hasn't been found "

Tarrant's chair creaked as he turned towards her and a match, flaring in his hand, showed his surprised and interested expression "Valerie," he said, "you have constructed the best theory yet Really, that's very good It covers all the facts of the case except one So I'm afraid it won't work, but I can see that you and I are going to get on famously It's too bad you have forgotten that one little point Black was a well-to-do man Kidnapping is done for ransom, and surely he would have paid a ransom as an alternative to his wife's and his own suicide It is unreasonable to suppose that even a week's separation would cause him to choose so absurdly The only possibility would be that the child was taken by some enemy for revenge and no return intended That's too much like a bad shocker, I'm afraid it won't do It was a good try, though "

He rose and stretched "I'm going to take a stroll for a bit and then turn in early I imagine Valerie and Jerry would like to, too, after their ride" He turned and wandered slowly down the verandah

"So you give it up?" White called after him "No answer?"

"No All the first answers are washed out I'll grant you this, though, Morgan You have a very good replica of the *Mary Celeste*, all the essential items are there It's a problem all right, I'm not through thinking about it yet "

The matter remained in this state of suspense while we were sitting about the following morning after breakfast The day was

bright and clear but gave promise of becoming even hotter than the previous one, I was distinctly glad that Valerie and I were not to be touring the roads again

A half-hour or so later Morgan White made the suggestion that we try his tennis court, since if we delayed much longer it might well become too uncomfortable for playing. Every one was agreeable and we tramped down to the court, which turned out to be of clay in excellent condition. "Jim Duff, the Constables' hired man, rolls it for me every other morning before he goes up to their place," White confided.

We proceeded to enjoy the fruits of Duff's labours. After several sets it was getting considerably hotter and Valerie voted for doubles. We won, though I am not at all sure it was due entirely to our play, during the second and last set I, for one, was beginning to feel a touch weary.

Every one agreed, at the conclusion of that set, that swimming was the form of exercise now indicated. All of us except Val were dripping. In fifteen minutes or less we had reassembled at White's boathouse in bathing suits and stood smoking a final cigarette along the little platform by the side of the boathouse proper that covers his *Grey Falcon*. I remarked upon the diving-board protruding over the water at the platform's end and White assured us all that the lake here was seven or eight feet deep, so that diving was feasible. The afternoon before I had simply jumped off the end of his dock.

"I think I'll be trying it," I informed the rest, just as White turned to Tarrant and pointed out over the water.

"There, see that boat?" he said. "About two-thirds across the lake, heading north. That's *Torment IV*, the one we were discussing last night. Wait till I get my glasses from the boathouse and you can have a good look at her, Trevis."

He unlocked the boathouse door and disappeared inside, returning at once with a pair of binoculars which he handed over. At the moment, however, I was more interested in getting wet than seeing a motor-boat. Valerie was already in the water, shouting that it was perfect and calling the rest of us Sissies. "You look," I told Tarrant. "I'm for a dive." White apparently felt the same way, for upon turning the glasses over to his friend, he immediately took a header into the lake.

Thus it happened that the first intimation of excitement reached me in mid-air. I had struck the end of the board hard and it threw me high. At the top of the spring I was just touching my feet for a jack-knife when Tarrant's shout came to me. "Morgan! Morgan, come here! Hurry! We must get your——" Swish into the water went my head and his words were cut off, but on the way I got an

upside-down view of Tarrant holding the binoculars steadily to his eyes, his mouth suddenly grim as he called out

Under the water I twisted back towards the dock and, reaching an arm over the platform above me, pulled myself partway up "What ho?" I demanded

White was already clambering up and Tarrant disappearing through the door "The boat," he called after him "Hurry up! How fast can we get her out?"

Tarrant's calm is proverbial, but when he wants to, he can certainly work quickly By the time I got inside he had the slide-door at the end almost up and White, dropping into the driving seat of the *Grey Falcon*, was pushing the starter-button "All clear," called Tarrant, the rat-tat-tat of the motor fell to a grind as the clutch went into reverse Just as the boat began to back out, Valerie jumped down into the rear deck

We came around in a wide circle and headed out into the lake, the motor coughing a little as it was opened full without any preliminary warning Tarrant said, "They jumped You'll have another tragedy unless we can get there in time"

"What is this about?" cried Valerie "Who jumped where? Have you boys all gone crazy?" Valerie has noticed, I think, that men of Tarrant's age rather like to have her call them boys

His voice was unpleasantly serious as he answered "The people in that boat I was watching, this *Torment* of yours, Morgan There were two people in her, a big man and a little one, or maybe a man and a boy——"

"Tom Constable and junior, his son, undoubtedly," White put in, without turning his head

"Suddenly the man who was driving scrambled out of his seat and into the rear deck, where the boy was riding He grabbed the boy's arm and immediately jumped overboard, pulling the boy with him Here, Morgan, don't follow the boat! There's no one in it The place where they went out is almost on a direct line between your boat and that big rock on the other shore"

All of us except White were on our feet looking helplessly across the water to where, a good two miles away now, *Torment IV* was still speeding up the lake with her bow waves curving high on both sides It gave me a queer feeling, that boat which I could just see was empty (now that I had been told), driving along as if operated by an invisible pilot The sun was burning down, making such a glare on the lake that it was impossible to discern any small object on the surface Such as a man's head, for example Tarrant had the binoculars (being Tarrant, of course, he had not failed to bring them) held to his eyes with one hand, attempting to shade their glasses with the other

"Have you got her at top speed, Morgan?" he demanded "Best part of a mile yet to go, as I judge it"

"Everything she's got," grunted White "Full out Check my direction if you see anything"

"Thought I saw them a minute ago Right together Lost them now"

"Not good swimmers Nowhere nearly as good as the Blacks Doubt if they can stay up long enough"

"Oh," said Valerie, and sat down abruptly, her rubber bathing trunks making a sjudging sound on a cushion "Hurry, Mr. White Oh, hurry!"

White said, "Agh!"

"Lost 'em," Tarrant announced definitely "Not a sign"

Nor was there a sign when, some minutes later, we came up to the spot where, as closely as Tarrant was able to guess, the thing had happened For five or ten minutes we floated, with the motor cut off, peering over the sides and in all directions around the *Grey Falcon* Nothing but the calm, bright water of Winnespequam, ruffled by the lightest of breezes, met our gaze Valerie, too, searched with the rest of us, although I could see from her expression that she wasn't very anxious to discover anything "Of course," Tarrant pointed out, "I can't be positive as to the spot The line is right, but the exact distance from your boathouse, Morgan, is another thing"

We began to circle slowly, in wider and wider courses

"Any use diving?" I asked, having some vague notion that these people could possibly be brought up and resuscitated

"No good Deep here, take a deep-sea diver to fetch bottom Besides we don't know where they went down Even if the line is right, they may have swum some distance in any direction before they gave out Not to the shore, though They never made that"

Our search went on But though we circled over a large area for more than two hours, not a trace did we find either of the man or of the boy Finally, "Nothing more we can do," said White gloomily "They sink in this lake Didn't recover the others for three days Might as well run up towards Winnespequam and see what happened to the boat" He turned the wheel and we headed north

Scarcely had we gone a mile when on the shore off our starboard side we saw a knot of persons gathered at the edge of the lake; and a little distance from them, what was obviously the boat we sought I wondered, as we approached, at the unmistakable signs of excitement evidenced by the small group, for surely *Torment IV* must have grounded here nearly two hours previously

We landed a hundred yards to the south at a disused and ram-

shackle dock, and made our way to the scene. An old man passed us as we drew near, he was hobbling along, shaking his head, and his mumbling reached us clearly enough—" 'Tis bewitched, she be a devil's boat "

It took us some time to discover, from the excited replies of the people we came up with, that yet a further tragedy had occurred. They interrupted each other and told the story backwards rather than forwards, but at last we pieced together the following account.

Torment IV, after the affair that Tarrant had witnessed, had run ashore upon a small island so close to the town wharf that she had been seen by numerous loungers. Among these was Jim Duff, in the village on an errand, and he had at once procured another boat and been taken out to salvage that of the Constables. The latter seemed, at any rate, to possess her own luck, for neither in running afoul of the island nor in her present landing had she suffered much harm. Duff had put himself aboard and, finding all in good order, had set off towards the Constables' dock alone, after expressing his fears to his companions that some ill must have befallen his employers.

The story then passed to four fishermen who, having been almost where we now stood, had witnessed the sequel. Duff, they asserted, had been passing not far from shore on his way south when, without any evident cause, he leapt from the seat he occupied and dived overboard. No doubt he twisted the wheel as he jumped away, for *Torment IV* turned and headed in. Two of the fishermen, however, seeing their friend struggling in the water, had immediately put out in their row-boat and gone to his rescue. Duff was a strong swimmer, accustomed to the lake since boyhood, but to their astonishment, no sooner did he note their approach than he turned and, in place of coming ashore, swam out into the lake with every appearance of panic. They were still some distance away from him when this happened and, though they made all possible efforts to overtake the man, he had sunk three times before they reached him, and he had drowned. Nevertheless, after much exertion they had been able to recover his body.

For the first time we noticed a still form, covered by one of the fisherman's blankets, lying farther up the bank among the trees.

"Have you tried resuscitation?" asked Tarrant sharply.

"More'n an hour an' a half we tried," he was told. "He be dead, he be."

White and Tarrant walked over to the body and, after sending Valerie back to the *Grey Falcon*, I followed. When I arrived, they had drawn back the blanket and were looking at the corpse. It was not a pleasant sight. I have been led to believe that persons who have drowned wear a peaceful expression but this one assuredly did

not He was a man of about forty-eight or fifty, a native New Hampshireman, bony and obviously strong But on his face there was stamped a hideous grimace, an expression so obviously of extreme horror that it would have been essentially identical on any cast of features

With a grunt Morgan quietly replaced the blanket "That's him, all right, that's Jim Duff"

When we returned to the shoreline, arrangements were being made to tow *Torment IV* back to the Constables' dock No one seemed anxious to pilot her, and I noted a bit absently that our host did not volunteer his services this time, however willing he may have been on the first occasion he had told us about Once more in the *Grey Falcon*, we backed out on the water and steered for home A subdued party It was Tarrant who broke the silence after it had continued for several minutes

"No use trying to avoid the subject," he said "We're all thinking about it If what I saw earlier, and what has just happened here, isn't due to some form of insanity arising with the utmost suddenness, God knows what it may be"

Silence again

White spoke this time, gruffly "How can a boat drive people insane? Certainly not a hard-boiled old-timer like Duff"

"Could it, could it be sunstroke?" Valerie asked in a small voice "It's awfully hot"

Tarrant admitted, "There's no question it's hot But I don't see a sunstroke theory None of us feel any symptoms, do we? And we have been on the lake longer than any of them were"

"But what *can* have made them do it?"

"I don't know," said Tarrant in a low tone "I confess I don't know At first I felt that some deep cause for suicide must be operating in the Black-Constable family What I saw surely looked like nothing so much as a determined suicide combined with murder, or perhaps a double suicide But that's out now, definitely This man Duff could hardly be involved in such a thing and, furthermore, I don't believe for a moment that he had the least idea of doing away with himself when he started that boat down the lake"

No one had even a conjecture to add The rest of our return was only the purring of the engine and the slap-slither of the little waves against our boat As for me, I was completely bewildered Here were a succession of calamities, first three persons, then two, finally one, who for no reason at all had abruptly cast themselves into the lake to drown The last two tragedies had been amply witnessed, one by Tarrant himself through the binoculars, the other by no less than four fishermen, friends of the unfortunate man, and this time at a reasonably short range

One must suppose, at all events, that the first disaster had been similar to its successors, a finding that scarcely did much to account for any of them. The last victim's relations with the others had certainly not been of a nature so serious as to form a bond of death. What could possibly have caused such different types of people, in broad daylight, on this peaceful lake, and plainly menaced by no danger, to jump and die? Duff's reported actions, surely, appeared to indicate that, once out of the boat, he was determined to drown. Suicide seemed absurd, and yet his actions had comported with it. Both sight and sound—for his friends had shouted at him—had combined to assure him that help was close at hand. But he had renounced all aid. Involuntarily I shook my head. It just didn't make sense.

When we landed, Tarrant made an abrupt excuse and hurried off to the house in his bathing suit. Apparently he changed with some speed, for he was nowhere to be found when the rest of us climbed the path.

He was late for dinner. We were half-way through the main course when he came in and sat down at the table. "Glad you didn't wait for me," he said, a little absently. On his forehead there still lingered the trace of the frown that always accompanies his most strenuous thinking.

"Didn't know whether you'd show up or not," White remarked in explanation. "Where have you been?"

"Looking over that boat."

"Thought so. Find anything?"

"Not a thing," answered Tarrant frankly. "That is, if you mean, as I take it you do, anything that throws light on these strange deaths."

For a time he applied himself to his meal, but when he had caught up with us at its end, he pushed back his chair and addressed us. "I examined this *Torment IV* from stem to stern. She is a beautiful boat, Morgan, no doubt about it, and she has gotten out of these mishaps herself with no more than a few dents in the bows. And a long gash coming back from the bow on one side where she careened off a rock when grounding on the island. It's above the water-line and scarcely an eighth of an inch deep. No real harm, but just another item resembling the *Mary Celeste*. You remember *she* had strips in her, running back from the bows, too. It's a strange coincidence how these circumstances match, even down to the condition of the boat—so far as a motor-boat *can* exhibit the same conditions as a two hundred-ton brig."

In the short pause I queried, "Still, that doesn't get us anywhere, does it?"

He agreed. "As you say. Even if we had reason to believe that

the same causes were operating—since several of the same symptoms have appeared—we have no further clue, since we don't know what could have brought about the situation on the *Mary Celeste*. And of course we have no right to assume even similar causes, a hundred to one this is merely a superficial resemblance."

Came one of White's grunts "Nothing at all, eh? Nothing? What were you looking for?"

"To tell you the truth," Tarrant confessed with a smile, "I'm afraid I was looking for some sort of mechanical arrangement. I don't know exactly what. Something along the lines of Jerry's idea of a poison gas, possibly. Since it obviously couldn't come from the motor in the routine way, I considered the possibility of a small, hidden tank concealed somewhere on board. With a blower or insufflator arrangement, of course. Although I have some knowledge of gases and have never heard of one having the observed effects, it is still possible. That would at least indicate malice, murder, in fact, and we should have a reasonable background for these events. Pretty far-fetched, I admit. You see to what conjectures I have been reduced by the apparently inexplicable data. . . I have never cared much for supernatural explanations."

"Hmph. Why 'apparently' inexplicable? Looks actually inexplicable to me."

"Nothing," said Tarrant shortly, "is actually inexplicable. That is, if you credit Causation. I do. What is loosely called the 'inexplicable' is only the unexplained, certainly not the unexplainable. The term is quite literally a mere catchword for ignorance. That's our present relation to the deaths, we are still ignorant of their cause."

"Guess we'll have to remain so this time."

"Oh, no. After our experience to-day, it's a challenge I accept."

Something in his tone interested Valerie. She said, "I'm glad you won't give it up. But what else can you do now, if you have already examined the boat?"

"I've examined the boat. Thoroughly. I even had the floorboards up; I couldn't take the engine out but I did everything else. Had a boy go under her in the dock and he reported everything ship-shape and just as it ought to be along the keel."

"Well, then," Val repeated, "what is left that you can do?"

Tarrant smiled. "Now I'm disappointed in you, Valerie. Surely that is obvious. There is something pretty drastic that happens to people in that boat. There is only one alternative left now. With Jerry's help I propose to find out to-morrow what it is that happens. When we know that, it may be possible for us to deal with it."

"Oh. Oh, I see. Of course. You're going out in the boat yourself." Val paused, and added suddenly, "Not with Jerry, you're

not! No, I won't listen to it I won't let Jerry go anyv here re-- the horrible thing!"

I expostulated If Tarrant was willing to risk his neck, it seemed only fair that some one eles should go with him Morgan White offered to go immediately, but it appeared that Trevis preferred me for some reason

"He won't have to go very near it, Valerie," Tarrant assured her "I wouldn't myself permit him to come with me in the boat I only want him to follow me at a respectful distance in the *Grey Falcon*, so that, if I jump over, he can pick me up There must be a reason why people jump"

In the end we persuaded her, though Tarrant did most of it There are times when Valerie seems hardly to listen to *me* He persuaded her not only to permit me to follow him but not to come along herself As usual, he had his way

We all went down to the boathouse after breakfast White explained to me how to run his boat, which was simple enough, and Tarrant and I started off for the Constables' dock, leaving Valerie and our host behind He agreed to run *Torment IV* up and down the lake opposite the boathouse, so that they could observe what happened, if anything

On the way over, Tarrant produced the implements with which he had equipped the *Grey Falcon* earlier in the day—so as not to worry Valerie unnecessarily, he said They made a curious collection There was a shotgun and, somewhat redundantly, a rifle, an axe and a long rope with a lasso at its end completed his equipment

Naturally my attention was caught by the fire-arms "But what can we use those for?" I inquired curiously "Is there some one to shoot at? But no, there wasn't any one in the boat except the people who jumped out of it, each time And this morning you are going alone, aren't you?"

"I don't know I'm going alone, yes On the other hand, there is certainly villainy of some kind here, and where there is villainy, it has been my experience that there is usually a villain I'm glad it turned out a good hot day again"

More puzzled than ever, I said, "We threw out the sunstroke theory, didn't we? What in heaven's name has a hot day got to do with it?"

"I don't know, Jerry, honestly I don't," Tarrant grinned "I have the haziest notion about this thing, but it is much too vague for me to tell you So far as I know, there are only two conditions leading up to these deaths, a ride in *Torment IV* and a bright, warm day Since I want to see duplicated whatever happens, I am glad that both conditions are fulfilled"

There was no time for more, as we had now reached the Constables' dock. Tarrant, who had taken the precaution of donning his bathing trunks, landed and was admitted to the boathouse by a man who evidently had been waiting for him. After a short delay—no doubt he was making another examination of *Torment IV*—I heard him start the motor and, a moment later, the ill-omened motor-boat slid slowly out of its shelter.

The events that succeeded constituted a series of complete surprises for me, culminating in sheer amazement. He turned and headed the boat out into the lake, opening her up fairly wide, and I brought the *Grey Falcon* along in his wake as closely as I dared, constantly alert for any change of direction or other sudden action on his part. *Torment IV* had a driving seat stretching entirely across the centre of the boat, and my first surprise was to observe Tarrant clamber up on this and crouch there in a most uncomfortable position, as he manipulated the controls. Nothing further happened, however, and while continuing to watch carefully, I could not avoid wondering again for what purpose he had provided the weapons in my own craft.

I realised that it was foolish and yet I could think of no other type of explanation of the tragedies than a supernatural one. A ghost or ghoul? In broad daylight, on a motor-boat? Even so, a shotgun isn't of much use against a ghost. But of course that was nonsense, anyhow. Even the strange coincidence of sudden, self-destructive madness on the part of these diverse people in similar circumstances, was better. And again, you can't shoot madness. The rope and the axe I abandoned hopelessly.

By now we had reached the centre of the lake and Tarrant motioned to me, without turning around, that he proposed to slow down. As I did so, too, I saw that he had produced a length of stout cord and was lashing *Torment IV*'s wheel in such a way that the boat would continue forward in a large circle.

When he had done so, he scrambled out of the driver's seat altogether and, passing right by the rear well-deck with its comfortable chairs, gained the upper decking of the hull itself as far astern as he could get, immediately over the propeller, in fact. There he stood upright, balancing easily on both feet and intently observing the entire boat ahead of him, almost all of which was visible from his position.

And nothing happened. *Torment IV* continued to circle at a reduced speed and Tarrant continued to watch as tensely as ever. It went on for so long that I am afraid I was beginning to get a little careless. I must have been all of seventy-five yards away when suddenly I saw him stiffen, start to turn away, take one more glance forward—and dive!

I strained my eyes, but I could see no change whatsoever in his

boat, which was keeping placidly on her circular course. It certainly looked as if he had seen something, but if so, it remained invisible to me. Abruptly I came to and swung the *Grey Falcon* towards where he was swimming with more speed than I had thought him capable of. Even yet I was not much concerned. Tarrant was neither a Philadelphian merchant nor a backwoodsman. Furthermore, he was a good swimmer and in his bathing suit. Accordingly my astonishment all but took my breath away entirely when, as I came up towards him, he gave a horrified glance over his shoulder, and twisting abruptly away from the *Grey Falcon*, dug his arms into the water in a panic-stricken Australian crawl!

In that moment I realised we were up against something serious. I threw in the clutch and went after him. Fortunately I could always overtake him with the motor-boat I had; and I prepared to jump in for him if he showed signs of sinking. I was sure that, no matter how good a swimmer he was, he would sink before he reached Winnespequam, some eight miles away, for he was heading up the lake directly towards the town, although the nearest shore was well within a mile.

I was drawing up to him again, but this time, instead of slowing down, I sent the boat past him as closely as I dared. And as I went past, I yelled at the top of my voice, "Tarrant! For God's sake, what the hell has gotten into you!"

Evidently one of his ears was out of the water, for he hesitated and raised his head. For a moment he regarded my boat and myself without recognition, then he trod water and looked anxiously all about. I was coming about now, having been carried beyond him, and I heard his hoarse shout, "All right. I'm coming aboard."

He was literally shaking when I helped pull him over the side and for a minute or so he merely stood in the *Grey Falcon* and gasped. Then he said suddenly, "Where is that devil's boat?" I was struck by the same expression the old man had used the day before.

"There she is," he went on. "She's getting too close in to shore. She mustn't land again!" In the chase after Tarrant I had almost forgotten *Torment IV*, but now I saw that she was, in fact, circling closer and closer to the edge of the lake.

"We shall have to get near enough, Jerry, so that I can rope that little mast on her bow," he grated. "Don't get *any* closer than you have to, though." And he added under his breath, "God, I hate to do this." Well, I gave up, in view of these unbelievable happenings it didn't seem even worth while asking questions. No matter what occurred, I didn't think my friend had gone mad.

I settled down to the job and soon made a parallel course with *Torment IV*. "Not so close, for God's sake!" yelled Tarrant. I eased off a little; and he threw his coiled rope. The third time he

succeeded, the noose settled accurately over the small mast and he jerked it tight "Make for the centre of the lake now, Jerry. Give it all you've got, you'll have to pull the other boat out of her course I didn't dare stop her completely for fear it wouldn't happen" As he spoke he was securing his end of the rope to a cleat, and immediately caught up the axe and took his stand above the taut line, looking anxiously along it So that was why he had brought the axe! Apparently he foresaw the possibility of having to sever the rope even before it could be released It was hard going, pulling against *Torment IV's* powerful engine, but finally we were well out in the lake again With an audible sigh of relief Tarrant brought down the axe, the rope snapped

"Now," he said, "the rifle," retrieving it from the floor and slipping in a cartridge It was a regulation Winchester, a heavy weapon "Go parallel again but at least twice as far away from her," he admonished me

When this course had been taken up to his satisfaction and we were a good hundred yards and more from *Torment IV*, he commenced firing at the empty boat The shots crashed out over the lake, a round dozen of them, and I saw that he was quite literally attacking the motor-boat itself A little series of spurts appeared just along its waterline as the bullets punched a neat row of holes through the hull

"Enough, I guess," he observed, putting down the rifle and catching up the shotgun, hastily loading both chambers We waited then, still accompanying *Torment IV* at the same distance; and shortly she began to list on the side towards us This had the effect of straightening her course somewhat but only for a few hundred yards, for she was filling rapidly now and beginning to plough down into the water Deliberately she settled on her star-board side until the lake poured over her rail, then with a final swirl her stern lifted a little and she went under

But, just as she did so, something climbed up on her port side and hopped away At the distance I couldn't see what it was, except that I should have judged it to be about two feet or more in diameter It made a dark spot against the bright water, and it did not sink On the contrary it scrambled over the surface and it was making directly for our boat "Easy, Jerry," Tarrant grated, as I instinctively put on speed, "we've got to get it"

Reluctantly I swung to port in order not to catch the thing in our wake It seemed to be coming towards us with the speed of lightning, I doubt if we could have distanced it, anyhow Tarrant's face was white and strained, and a tremor ran over his body as he raised his gun For a few seconds he waited, then fired Just behind the creature the water splattered where the shot struck the lake He had one more shot, the thing was closer now and still

coming rapidly. It was so close I could begin to see it clearly—the most repulsive animal I have ever looked at. Spiders always make me creepy, but this monstrous creature with its flashing legs its horribly hairy bulb of a body, was nauseating and worse than nauseating. There was something so horrifying about it that I very nearly jumped before it reached us. I could see, or imagined that I could, a beady, malignant eye fixed definitely upon me. If Tarrant had missed his last shot I don't know what would have happened. It's one of those things I don't let myself think about.

He didn't miss. Simultaneously with the roar of the gun, the water about it churned and the monster disappeared, blown to bits.

For the next ten minutes we drifted aimlessly. I was being sick over the side of the *Grey Falcon*.

"I think," said Tarrant that evening, "that it was some member of the *Lycosidæ* or wolf-spider species. Or else one of the larger species of *Avicularidæ*, some of which grow to great size. Even so, I have never heard of anything as large as this having been reported. And judging from the experiences here I judge it unlikely that many observers will live to report it. Although the poisonous effects of most spider bites are exaggerated, I have a feeling that this one's bite was fatal.

"Of course I had some inkling as to what to expect. Oh, not such a spider, I couldn't guess that. Although I should have done. When I was examining the motor yesterday, I did see some heavy cobwebbing way up under the bow, but at that time I didn't think that any sort of spider could be so terrifying, I am not greatly upset by spiders myself. Just the same, reason told me that something appeared on that boat which drove people overboard in a panic. And since the motor was the only portion of it that I was unable to examine thoroughly, it was from that direction that I looked for it. That is why, as soon as I could, I lashed the wheel and got as far away from the driving seat as was possible. The heat, I believe, brought it out, not only the heat of the motor but also that of the sun pouring down on the forward deck. How it got into the driver's cockpit I don't know, the first I saw of it was when it sprang up on the back of the seat.

"I can't express the horror and loathing its appearance inspired. It was sufficient to make Jerry pretty ill—and it never got within twenty yards of him. Sheer panic, that's what one felt in its presence. When I struck the water, I had no thought of where I was going, only a hopeless conviction that I would surely be overtaken. I forgot everything, all my own preparations, and the mere swish of Jerry's boat when he first came toward me only increased my terror. That is why Duff turned away from his rescuers, in his panic-stricken condition he may even have imagined that the

rowboat with its oars was the beast itself Well, thank God I recovered sufficiently to get into the *Grey Falcon* and finish the job "

"Suppose there'll be no trouble about the motor-boat?"

"Oh, no I didn't see the widow, but she sent word that I could blow it up if I wished and good riddance The loss of the boat was a small price, I think "

Valerie shuddered and reached for my hand "Jerry," she said, "it's nice here, but take me home to-morrow, please?"



